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ABSTRACT

This book provides biographical profiles of 11 authors of interest to readers ages 9 and above and was created to appeal to young readers in a format they can enjoy reading and readily understand. Biographies were prepared after extensive research, and each volume contains a cumulative index, a general index, a place of birth index, and a birthday index. Each entry in provides at least one picture of the individual profiled, and bold-faced rubrics lead the reader to information on birth, youth, early memories, education, first jobs, marriage and family, career highlights, memorable experiences, hobbies, and honors and awards. All entries end with a list of easily accessible sources designed to lead the student to further reading on the individual. Volume 6 features the following authors: Lloyd Alexander (1924-); Paula Danziger (1944-); Nancy Farmer (1941-); Zora Neale Hurston (Retrospective) (1891?-1960); Shirley Jackson (Retrospective) (1916-1965); Angela Johnson (1961-); Jon Krakauer (1954-); Leo Lionni (Obituary) (1910-1999); Francine Pascal (1938-); Louis Sachar (1954-); and Kevin Williamson (1965-). (BT)

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Biography Today: Profiles of People of Interest to Young Readers. Author Series. Volume 6.

Harris, Laurie Lanzen, Ed.
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Vol. 6

Biography Today

Profiles of People of Interest to Young Readers

Featured in this issue . . .

Lloyd Alexander
Paula Danziger
Nancy Farmer
Shirley Jackson
Jon Krakauer
Francine Pascal
Kevin Williamson

Leo Lionni

Zora Neale Hurston

Louis Sachar

Angela Johnson

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Biography Today

Profiles of People of Interest to Young Readers

Author Series

Volume 6
1999

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Executive Editor

Cherie D. Abbey
Associate Editor

Omnigraphics

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Preface

Welcome to the sixth volume of the **Biography Today Author Series**. We are publishing this series in response to the growing number of suggestions from our readers, who want more coverage of more people in *Biography Today*. Several volumes, covering **Artists, Authors, Scientists and Inventors, Sports Figures, and World Leaders,** have appeared thus far in the Subject Series. Each of these hardcover volumes is 200 pages in length and covers approximately 12 individuals of interest to readers ages 9 and above. The length and format of the entries will be like those found in the regular issues of *Biography Today*, but there is **no duplication** between the regular series and the special subject volumes.

The Plan of the Work

As with the regular issues of *Biography Today*, this special subject volume on **Authors** was especially created to appeal to young readers in a format they can enjoy reading and readily understand. Each volume contains alphabetically arranged sketches. Each entry provides at least one picture of the individual profiled, and bold-faced rubrics lead the reader to information on birth, youth, early memories, education, first jobs, marriage and family, career highlights, memorable experiences, hobbies, and honors and awards. Each of the entries ends with a list of easily accessible sources designed to lead the student to further reading on the individual and a current address. Obituary entries are also included, written to provide a perspective on the individual's entire career. Obituaries are clearly marked in both the table of contents and at the beginning of the entry.

Biographies are prepared by Omnigraphics editors after extensive research, utilizing the most current materials available. Those sources that are generally available to students appear in the list of further reading at the end of the sketch.

Indexes

Beginning with all publications in 1999, a new Index is appearing in *Biography Today*. In an effort to make the index easier to use, we have combined the **Name** and **General Index** into one, called the **General Index**. This new index contains the names of all individuals who have appeared in *Biography Today* since the series began. The names appear in bold faced type,

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followed by the issue in which they appeared. The General Index also contains the occupations and ethnic and minority origins of individuals profiled. The General Index is cumulative, including references to all individuals who have appeared in the *Biography Today* General Series and the *Biography Today* Special Subject volumes since the series began in 1992.

The Birthday Index and Places of Birth Index will continue to appear in all Special Subject volumes.

Our Advisors

This volume was reviewed by an Advisory Board comprised of librarians, children's literature specialists, and reading instructors so that we could make sure that the concept of this publication—to provide a readable and accessible biographical magazine for young readers—was on target. They evaluated the title as it developed, and their suggestions have proved invaluable. Any errors, however, are ours alone. We'd like to list the Advisory Board members, and to thank them for their efforts.

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Our Advisory Board stressed to us that we should not shy away from controversial or unconventional people in our profiles, and we have tried to follow their advice. The Advisory Board also mentioned that the sketches might be useful in reluctant reader and adult literacy programs, and we would value any comments librarians might have about the suitability of our magazine for those purposes.

Your Comments Are Welcome

Our goal is to be accurate and up-to-date, to give young readers information they can learn from and enjoy. Now we want to know what you think. Take a look at this issue of *Biography Today*, on approval. Write or call me with your comments. We want to provide an excellent source of biographical information for young people. Let us know how you think we're doing.

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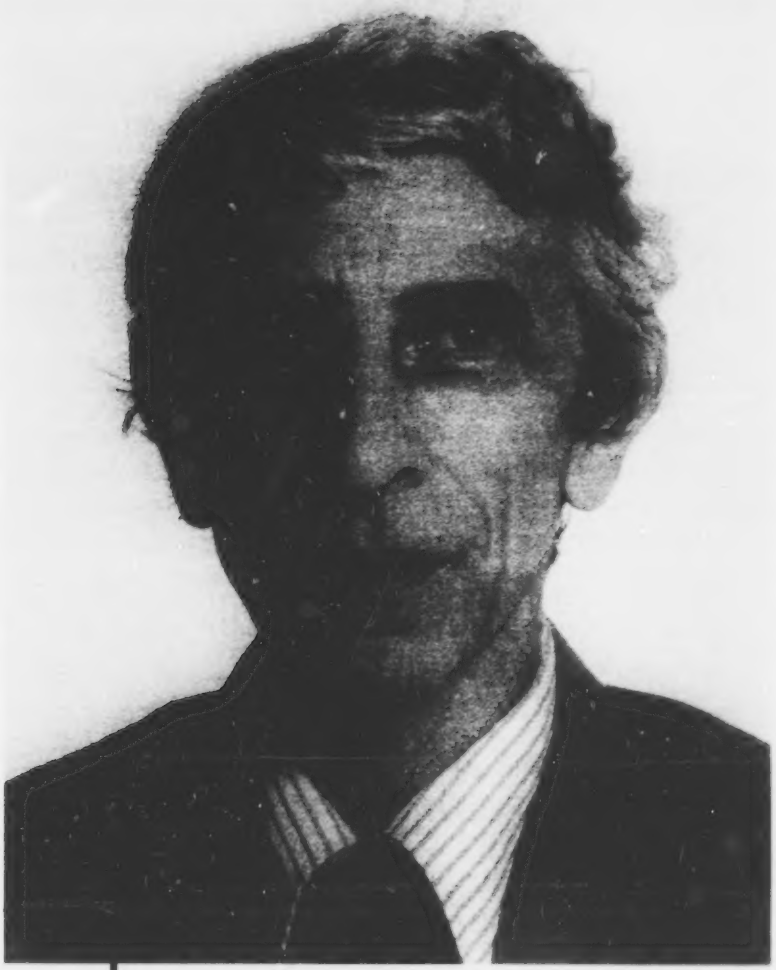


Lloyd Alexander 1924-

American Fantasy Writer
Author of Such Award-Winning Books as the Prydain Chronicles, the Westmark Series, and the Vesper Holly Adventures

BIRTH

Lloyd Chudley Alexander was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on January 30, 1924. His mother, Edna (Chudley) Alexander, was born near Philadelphia. She was a homemaker who shared her interest in books and art with him. His father, Alan Alexander, was born in Jamaica and immigrated to the

United States as a teenager. He eventually became a businessman, working as both a stockbroker and an importer. Unfortunately, he lost all his money when the stock market crashed in 1929, which led to the Great Depression. But he later started a series of small businesses. He was a dreamer who was always thinking of new ways to get rich quick. Alexander also had one sister, Florence, who was five years older.

YOUTH

Alexander became interested in reading at a very young age. He taught himself to read between the ages of three and four, then spent his days working his way through the unusual collection of books his father and mother owned. His parents didn't like to read and never even opened the books; they had bought them secondhand as decorations. "I learned to read quite young and have been an avid reader ever since," he related, "even though my parents and relatives were not great readers. I was more or less left to my own devices and interests, which, after all, may not be such a bad idea."

Many of Alexander's earliest memories involve books and reading. "A Saturday night treat for me was to be taken window shopping along 52nd Street in West Philadelphia," he remembered. "It was a dazzling assortment of pawnshops, candy shops, clothing stores, installment-payment jewelry stores, and shoeshine parlors. My magnet was a stationery store with a few shelves of children's books in the rear. One such evening, my eyes fixed on the full-color cover of *King Arthur and His Knights*. There was no hesitation. I seized it. From then on, I sniffed out every hero tale and legend I could find." One of Alexander's favorite authors was Charles Dickens. He especially fell in love with stories about heroes and Greek, Roman, Irish, and Welsh mythological tales. To this day, reading is a passion. "I read for pleasure," he noted. "Reading takes us where we want to go, to places where we have never been."

Alexander has fond memories of the Philadelphia neighborhood where he grew up. Horse-drawn carts were still common during his childhood. They were often used by vendors to sell their fruits and vegetables on the crowded city streets. He remembers feeding the horses, watching organ grinders with their pet monkeys, and visiting traveling carnivals.

Growing up, Alexander was never very close to his parents. But he still loved them and got along with them quite well. "It was never, 'Oh I hate my father, my mother' . . . there was no problem to be resolved, because we didn't really deal with each other," he recalled. "They let me do what-

ever it was I was doing, and I let them do whatever they were doing. We were fond of each other, but that was about it."

EDUCATION

Alexander started out at the Friends Elementary School, a private Quaker elementary school in Philadelphia. He demonstrated his intelligence at a very early age—he started school in the third grade after tests determined he could skip grades one and two. This made him the smallest and youngest boy in his class, and he was often teased by the older children. Unfortunately, the constant teasing made him dislike school. "The least said of my school days the better, and the least I can say is that I hated every moment, with the resolute, all-encompassing hatred which would take long practice even for an adult to achieve," he stated. "[My hatred was] puzzling, for learning anything and everything always excited me. Yet school, to me, seemed hardly the place to do it."

> *"I learned to read quite young and have been an avid reader ever since, even though my parents and relatives were not great readers. I was more or less left to my own devices and interests, which, after all, may not be such a bad idea."*

When Alexander was eight years old, his family moved to Drexel Hill, a suburb of Philadelphia. At that point, his family could no longer afford to pay for private schooling, and he attended the remainder of elementary school, plus junior high and high school, at the public schools there. Even though he disliked school, Alexander was a fairly good student. In high school he acted in class plays, participated on the debate team, served on the student council, and wrote for the school newspaper. He graduated from Upper Darby Senior High School in 1940, at the age of 16. "My high school graduation came as a relief and a shock," he recalled. "I had never been fond of school and was glad to be rid of it." At that point, college just wasn't an option; his family couldn't afford it. Later, he did complete one year of college classes.

By the end of high school, Alexander knew that he wanted to be a writer. He had been writing poetry at night, and he knew he wanted to continue. "I think that when it comes to the arts, whether it's writing, painting, music, or what have you, I'm not sure you decide [to do it]. I think you find out," he explained. "I think you discover it or realize it, because I

don't think there was ever a day that I consciously decided I was a writer. I think I just realized it and then decided—'Well yes, I'm going to have to work and do something about it.'" He announced to his family that he planned to be a poet. His father opposed the idea because he did not consider writing to be real work. His mother, however, was on his side. She championed his cause, and it was decided that he could pursue writing—if he also took a day job to support himself.

"The least said of my school days the better, and the least I can say is that I hated every moment, with the resolute, all-encompassing hatred which would take long practice even for an adult to achieve. [My hatred was] puzzling, for learning anything and everything always excited me. Yet school, to me, seemed hardly the place to do it."

FIRST JOBS

Once Alexander had graduated from high school, he put his plan to be a writer into motion. To keep the bargain he had struck with his father, he took a job as a messenger at Fidelity Philadelphia Trust Company. He hated it so much that he later made fun of a fictionalized version of the company in his first adult novel, *And Let the Credit Go*. "I felt like Robin Hood, chained in the Sheriff of Nottingham's dungeon," he said of that time. "I hated the bank even more than I hated school."

Each day, Alexander would get up early and write poetry before he went to work at the bank. He would also write each night after he got home. Since he disliked his job so much, he decided to try and save enough money to attend college. He felt that he needed to learn more in order to become a great writer. By the fall of 1941, he had saved enough to quit his job and start classes at West Chester State Teachers' College. Almost immediately, he realized he had made a mistake. He found that almost all of the courses he took were far too easy for him, and he quickly became bored. He dropped out of college in late 1942, after just one year.

World War II

By the time Alexander left college World War II was raging in Europe, and he decided to join the U.S. Army. He had no desire to be a career soldier,

but he wanted to help his country and also felt that "adventure . . . was the best way to learn writing." His early months in the army were difficult. First he was stationed in Texas and was assigned to an artillery crew, where he was supposed to learn how to load the huge guns. Because he was small, however, he kept dropping the shells. He was then assigned to a medical unit, but he fainted at the sight of blood. From there, it was on to the army band, where he played cymbals. Finally, he found a way to contribute when he learned that the army needed foreign-language translators. He had learned French in high school, so he signed up.

The army sent him to Lafayette College in Pennsylvania to study French history, geography, culture, customs, cuisine, and language. After that, he was sent to a training center for military intelligence officers, where he studied weaponry, commando tactics, and Morse code. Alexander then spent some time training in the country of Wales. This experience would later have a profound affect on his writing career. "Wales was an enchanted world. . . . It seemed I recognized faces from all the hero tales of my childhood," he remembered. "Wales, to my eyes, appeared still a realm of bards and heroes; even the coal-tips towered like dark fortresses. Not until years afterward did I realize I had been given, without my knowing, a glimpse of another enchanted kingdom."

After his intelligence training was complete, Alexander and the others were formed into five-man combat teams to work with French resistance fighters. After months working in the French countryside, translating intelligence reports, he was sent to Paris. There, he worked in military intelligence interrogating prisoners of war—Nazi agents, war criminals, and those who had collaborated with the Germans—and translating their statements. When the war ended in 1945, Alexander was stationed in Paris. He decided to remain there.

BECOMING A WRITER

In Paris after the war, Alexander became part of a thriving community of writers, musicians, and artists. His sharp intellect and imagination earned him many lifelong friends, including such famous people as the painter Pablo Picasso and the writer Gertrude Stein. When he met Stein for the first time, she gave him a piece of advice he remembered for the rest of his life: "What she gave me was an understanding that art and literature don't magically appear on museum walls and library bookshelves. They're the work of real women and men who lived in the real world." Alexander took classes at the famous Sorbonne at the University of Paris. There, he also met his future wife, Janine Denni, and her daughter Madeleine.

Alexander returned to the United States in 1946 and went to work as a translator. He translated the works of French poet Paul Eluard and a novel by famed French writer Jean Paul Sartre. He also began to write his own novel. Despite his commitment to his writing—he woke up at 3:30 every morning to write—his first novel was, in his own words, "pitiful." He sent it to an agent, whose only piece of advice was that Alexander should throw it out.

It was the first of many rejections he would receive. For seven long years, Alexander worked a series of day jobs to earn enough money to live on and wrote at night. Between 1948 and 1955, he worked as a cartoonist, a writer for an advertising firm, a layout-artist, and an editor for a business magazine. But every book he wrote during these years was rejected. Alexander almost gave up hope. Finally, a he wrote *And Let the Credit Go* (1955), a humorous book about a bank messenger based on his own experiences. When *And Let the Credit Go* was accepted for publication, Alexander could finally call himself the thing he most wanted to be—a novelist. He went out and bought four bottles of expensive champagne to celebrate.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

During the next 10 years, Alexander published several books that were intended for adults. Since his first novel had been based on his life experiences, he continued to use the events in his life and the people he knew as the basis for his stories. "I was writing out of my own life and experience," he noted. "Nearly 10 years passed before I learned a writer could know and love a fantasy world as much as his real world."

But after that, Alexander began to focus on books for children of all ages—from complex novels for young adults to picture books for the youngest readers. Alexander is an eclectic writer whose books don't easily fit into a single category, although he has often focused on fantasy and mythology. Many of his books are coming-of-age stories in which the hero reaches maturity by overcoming a series of trials, often guided by an

older, wiser friend. His work includes time-travel stories with cats, fantasy stories based upon Celtic mythology, short picture-book fables, an adventure series based on different historical periods, a mystery series based on the Sherlock Holmes stories, and other diverse writings.

Switching to Children's Books

Alexander did not suddenly decide one day that he would write children's books. It simply turned out to be the type of book that reflected his writing voice most honestly. "I was suddenly amazed because I was able to express things, which I was never able to express as clearly as I could, in this form," he stated. "I felt emotionally as if I were still writing for adults. It wasn't 'Ah, oh, this is for kiddies.'" The change to children's books caught Alexander off guard. "For years I wrote for adults. I was perfectly happy with it, having a certain modest success, and that's how I thought I would continue," he related. "[But] when I began writing for children . . . I discovered things about writing and the creative process that I never knew were there."

"For years I wrote for adults. I was perfectly happy with it, having a certain modest success, and that's how I thought I would continue," he related. "[But] when I began writing for children . . . I discovered things about writing and the creative process that I never knew were there."

Alexander first tried his hand at children's literature in 1958, when he wrote two biographies on assignment from a publisher. But he did not really make a mark in the field until 1963, when his first fantasy novel was published. This book was called *Time Cat: Remarkable Journeys of Jason and Gareth,* and it told a story about a young boy, Jason, and his magical black cat, Gareth. It's a time travel story in which Jason and Gareth travel through time and meet legendary people in different historical eras, from 2700 B.C. to contemporary times. The time travel device allowed Alexander to incorporate fantasy elements, which have become more prominent in his later books.

After *Time Cat,* Alexander began to think about a more ambitious project. While writing that novel, he had come across material that would shape his next books. He began to do research into anthropology and mythology, including the *Mabinogion,* a classic collection of Welsh legends.

"Suddenly, it was as if all the hero tales, games, dreams, and imaginings of my childhood had come back to me, all in the setting of the land of Wales I had so briefly seen, and which had so enchanted me as a soldier 20 years before. But I did not merely want to retell Welsh legends. Feeling free to use bits and pieces of this ancient material as they suited my own imagination, I hoped to invent my personal, private mythology." The result of this was the Prydain Chronicles.

"Wales was an enchanted world. . . . It seemed I recognized faces from all the hero tales of my childhood. Wales, to my eyes, appeared still a realm of bards and heroes; even the coal-tips towered like dark fortresses. Not until years afterward did I realize I had been given, without my knowing, a glimpse of another enchanted kingdom."

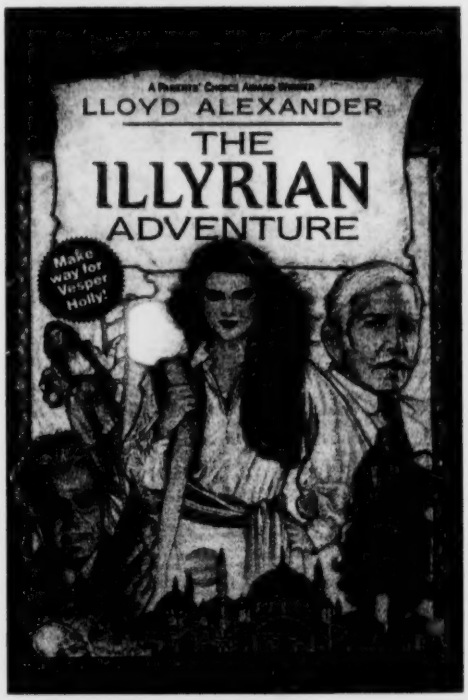
The Prydain Chronicles

Alexander is perhaps best known for his series of books known as the Prydain Chronicles. The series includes five books that create a complete mythical world: *The Book of Three* (1964), *The Black Cauldron* (1965), *The Castle of Llyr* (1966), *Taran Wanderer* (1967), and *The High King* (1968). The most famous book of the series is *The Black Cauldron,* which Walt Disney Productions turned into an animated movie in 1985.

Alexander first started writing the Chronicles because he wanted to do a story that was set in Wales—or at least a fantasy version of Wales. "Not the Wales I knew in reality, but an older, darker one," he explained. As a child, the tales of King Arthur and other stories set in Wales were his favorites. As he worked on the first book in the series, *The Book of Three,* he found that his writing was expanding his personal horizons. "I found myself, to my amazement, tapping into various areas of my personality that I never even knew existed," he stated. The series tells the story of a young man, Taran, who completes several heroic journeys and quests, during which he comes to understand the meaning of good and evil. While the series evokes ancient Wales, it also includes modern values, humor, and contemporary realism, with characters who think and act like modern people. Alexander's "total creation is a remarkable achievement," reviewer Houston L. Maples wrote in *Washington Post Book World,* "a rich and varied tapestry of brooding evil, heroic action, and great natural beauty, vividly conceived, romantic in mood, yet curiously contemporary in its immediacy and fast action."

The Prydain Chronicles were a great success with readers and critics. *The Black Cauldron* was a nominee for the Newbery Medal, the highest award in children's literature. When *The High King* received the prestigious Newbery Medal in 1969, it brought Alexander worldwide attention and respect. After completing the Chronicles, Alexander wrote several books that were simpler in style for a younger audience: *Coll and His White Pig* (1965) and *The Truthful Harp* (1967), which are picture books, and *The Foundling and Other Tales of Prydain* (1973), a collection of short stories. These were designed to give young readers a basic introduction to Prydain so that they would be ready to read the Chronicles when they were older.

Prydain was his main focus at that time, but he did write several other books that were not about the fantasy world. One of these books, *The Marvelous Misadventures of Sebastian,* is set in a fictional country that is reminiscent of 18th century Europe. It tells the story of a young boy who finds a special fiddle that helps him play wonderful music. The young fiddler tries to help a princess escape from a repressive ruler. "I suppose *Sebastian* attempts to say something about what it feels like to be an artist," Alexander once said. Writing the Prydain Chronicles was a profound experience, he said, one that gave him a brief glimpse of creativity. In Sebastian, he wanted to express that idea through metaphor. "Though I'm a miserably bad fiddler, trying to learn to play the violin as an adult gave me insights into music; by the same token, writing for young people gave me an insight into my own personality and the nature of art as well. So *Sebastian* was the result. Below the surface adventure, it's a very personal, very meaningful story for me. *Sebastian* is a metaphor, I suppose, for the creative process—the demands that creativity makes on us and our own commitment to it." *The Marvelous Misadventures of Sebastian* won the National Book Award in 1970.



Throughout the 1970s, Alexander continued to write for both younger readers and teens. Some of his notable titles from that period include *The Cat Who Wished to Be a Man* (1973), about a wizard's cat named Lionel who convinces his owner to

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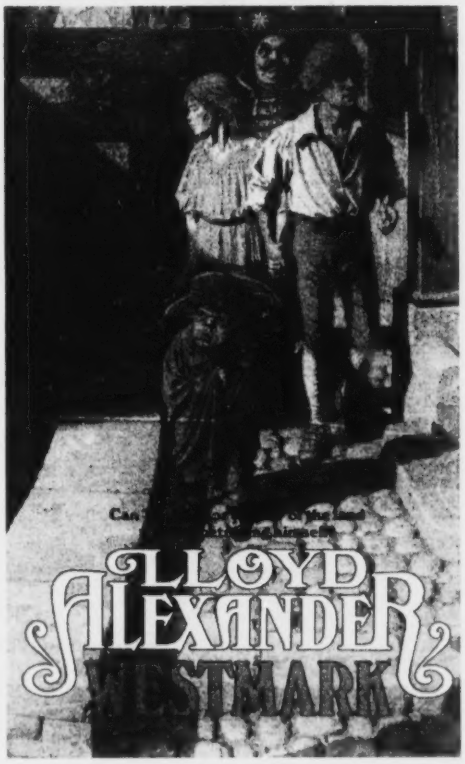
turn him temporarily into a man, but then finds it difficult to return to being a cat; *The Wizard in the Tree* (1975), about an enchanter named Arbican who rescues an orphan girl, Mallory, from a life of drudgery; *The Town Cat and Other Tales* (1977), a collection of eight satirical stories that feature clever cats in adventures that emphasize human shortcomings and moral dilemmas; and *The First Two Lives of Lukas-Kasha* (1978), set in ancient Persia and narrating the adventures of Lukas, who accepts the challenge of a magician and is suddenly transported to a distant shore, where the people greet him as their king. After these individual tales, Alexander went on to write two noteworthy series for young readers.

"I did not merely want to retell Welsh legends. Feeling free to use bits and pieces of this ancient material as they suited my own imagination, I hoped to invent my personal, private mythology."

The Westmark Series and the Vesper Holly Adventures

Alexander has written two other series of books that were praised by critics and readers alike. The Westmark Series includes three books: *Westmark* (1981), *The Kestrel* (1982), and *The Beggar Queen* (1984). It tells about the political development of the fictional land of Westmark. The story is told through the eyes of the reluctant hero Theo, a young orphan, and the queen-in-exile, Mickle, a strong sympathetic character forced to hide with the common people. While on the surface the trilogy is an entertaining piece of fantasy fiction, it is also a classic tale of loyalty, honor, duty, and the ethical dilemmas posed by the horror of war. The books are considered intense and uncompromising in their depictions of the nature of combat and suffering. The Westmark trilogy was Alexander's way of dealing with his feelings about his wartime experiences. The books showed men at their best and their worst, and pointed out how easy it is for people to become carried away during wartime and commit terrible acts against others. As critic Hazel Rochman wrote in *School Library Journal*, "The fast-paced plot, subtleties of character, ironic wit, quiet understatement, and pervasive animal imagery—all work with superb concentration to undercut the heroics of war." Children's literature specialist Zena Sutherland concurred, saying that "Alexander moves, as he did in the Prydain cycle, to deeper issues and subtler levels. . . . [While the Westmark Trilogy examines ethical issues, each of the books is] no less appealing as an adventure tale with a strong story line and rounded, consistent characterization."



The Vesper Holly Adventures include five books in the series: *The Illyrian Adventure* (1986), *The El Dorado Adventure* (1987), *The Drackenberg Adventure* (1988), *The Jedera Adventure* (1989), and *The Philadelphia Adventure* (1990). This series broke new ground for Alexander: for the first time, the main hero of his books was a young girl. Vesper Holly, a girl from Philadelphia, travels the world with her guardians during the 1870s. In each exotic locale, she encounters a new mystery and meets new heroes and villains. The books are intentional tributes to the Sherlock Holmes mysteries of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Sherlock Holmes is a famous fictional detective known for his ability to solve difficult cases through clever observation, logical deduction, knowledge of science, and remarkable concentration. In the Vesper Holly series, Alexander purposely tried to emphasize pure fun and entertainment instead of hiding messages with deeper meanings: "It was intended as an entertainment—for its author as much as anyone—with a gloriously fearless heroine, legendary heroes, inscrutable mysteries, and fiendish villains," he said.

Recent Books

In his recent books, Alexander has continued to focus on foreign lands and magical, fantastic adventures. Such countries as China, Cameroon, Greece, and India have served as settings for Alexander's tales, as have such fictional kingdoms as Arkadia and Sundari. History and myth remain his favorite subjects, which he has used to address difficult real-life issues within the structure of an exciting story.

These elements are all part of his recent book *The Remarkable Journey of Prince Jen* (1991), which is considered one of his most impressive fantasies. This clever coming-of-age story for young adults, set in eighth-century China, tells of a Chinese prince who is trying to learn how to govern well. It contains a good deal of Eastern philosophy, combined with exciting adventures, quirky characters, and humor. Alexander next

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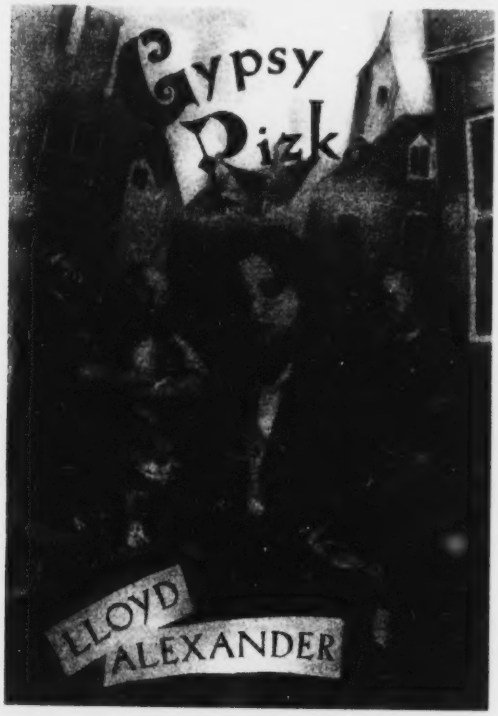

tried his hand at a picture book for younger readers in *The Fortune-Tellers* (1992), which is set in Cameroon. It tells about a young carpenter who visits a fortune-teller to learn about his future. The book is filled with the sly humor and wisdom of the West African people. Like *The Fortune-Tellers*, his next book was also a picture book. This fable, *The House Gobbaleen* (1995), tells the story of unlucky poor Tooley, who hopes for some help from the Friendly Folk, who roam the countryside ready to help those who need it. He invites an odd little man named Hooks into his home, hoping his luck will change, and it does—for the worse. But with the help of his wise cat, Tooley is able to outsmart Hooks.

Alexander returned to books for older readers with *The Arkadians* (1995). In this recent fantasy book set in a far-off land, the heroes and heroines wander in Arkadia, an ancient land that resembles Greece. This novel features Lucian, a young man who must flee the palace after he discovers a financial problem there. On his journey through Arkadia, Lucian meets up with an interesting array of characters and finds danger and adventure. In *The Iron Ring* (1997), Alexander focuses on Tamar, a young ruler of Sundari, a mythical kingdom in India. When Tamar loses a dice game, he loses everything—including his kingdom and his riches. In a quest to redeem his honor, he sets out on a journey to make good on his debt. Along the way, he is accompanied by a host of enchanted creatures. Tamar's trip becomes a voyage of self-discovery as he begins to question all his beliefs and learns about honor, friendship, and love. Alexander's most recent book is *Gypsy Rizka* (1999), a farcical comic opera about a clever, engaging, tricky, and outspoken gypsy girl who is seen as an outcast and a troublemaker by the other inhabitants of her small town. They wish they could get rid of her—if only they could find a way. Her interactions with the townspeople bring an element of farce and buffoonery to the novel, which celebrates Rizka's intelligence, independence, unconventional attitudes, and good heart.

Beloved Children's Writer

With dozens of children's books to his credit, Alexander finds that he is very well known in schools across the United States. Children love his books, and they also seem drawn to Alexander himself. They relate to him easily, and many seek him out. He receives a great deal of mail from young fans, and many go so far as to locate his phone number and call him at his home in Philadelphia. Some children have even come to his home unannounced. But Alexander loves the attention he gets from children and enjoys knowing that he has touched their lives in some way.

Now in his 70s, Alexander continues to write fantasies, often featuring a dreamer or storyteller dealing metaphorically with problems. When asked why he writes fantasy, Alexander responded like this: "I didn't turn to fantasy as any kind of escape whatsoever. Just the opposite. Fantasy has been, for me, the best way of expressing the real world, trying to understand or make sense of it." For Alexander, fantasy has been the best way to explore what is real. "Using the device of an imaginary world allowed me in some strange way to go to the central issues. In other words, I used the imaginary kingdom not as a sentimentalized fairyland, but as an opening wedge to express what I hoped would be some very hard truths. I never saw fairy tales as an escape or cop out. . . . On the contrary, speaking for myself, it is the way to understand reality."

"I didn't turn to fantasy as any kind of escape whatsoever. Just the opposite. Fantasy has been, for me, the best way of expressing the real world, trying to understand or make sense of it."

ADVICE TO YOUNG WRITERS

Alexander offers this advice for young people who want to become writers themselves. He tells them that they must do four things to succeed as a writer: read everything in sight; keep writing, no matter what type of writing it is; experience life to its fullest; and finally, have patience.

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

Alexander met his wife, Janine Denni, when he was stationed in France during World War II. They were married on January 8, 1946. Alexander

then became a stepfather to his wife's daughter, Madeleine, who died in 1991. He and Janine live in Drexel Hill, Pennsylvania, where he grew up.

HOBBIES AND OTHER INTERESTS

Throughout his life, Alexander's main interest other than writing has been music. When he was seven, he received a xylophone for Christmas. He also took piano lessons. "My first true instrument was our piano, a black giant named Bellak," he recalled. He later studied violin, which he still enjoys playing today.

WRITINGS

The Prydain Chronicles

The Book of Three, 1964
The Black Cauldron, 1965
The Castle of Llyr, 1966
Taran Wanderer, 1967
The High King, 1968

The Westmark Series

Westmark, 1981
The Kestrel, 1982
The Beggar Queen, 1984

The Vesper Holly Adventures

The Illyrian Adventure, 1986
The El Dorado Adventure, 1987
The Drackenberg Adventure, 1988
The Jedera Adventure, 1989
The Philadelphia Adventure, 1990

Other Books for Children and Young Adults

Border Hawk: August Bondi, 1958
The Flagship Hope: Aaron Lopez, 1960
Time Cat: The Remarkable Journeys of Jason and Gareth, 1963
Coll and His White Pig, 1965
The Truthful Harp, 1967
The Marvelous Misadventures of Sebastian, 1970

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The King's Fountain, 1971
The Four Donkeys, 1972
The Foundling and Other Tales of Prydain, 1973
The Cat Who Wished to Be a Man, 1973
The Wizard in the Tree, 1975
The Town Cats and Other Tales, 1977
The First Two Lives of Lukas-Kasha, 1978
The Remarkable Journey of Prince Jen, 1991
The Fortune-Tellers, 1992
The House Gobbaleen, 1995
The Arkadians, 1995
The Iron Ring, 1997
Gypsy Rizka, 1999

Books for Adults

And Let the Credit Go, 1955
My Five Tigers, 1956
Janine Is French, 1959
My Love Affair with Music, 1960
Park Avenue Vet, 1962
Fifty Years in the Doghouse, 1963
My Cats and Me: The Story of an Understanding, 1989

HONORS AND AWARDS

Isaac Siegel Memorial Juvenile Award: 1959, for *Border Hawk: August Bondi*

Notable Books for Children (American Library Association): 1964, for *The Book of Three*; 1996, for *The Arkadians*; 1998, for *The Iron Ring*

Best Books Citation (*School Library Journal*): 1967, for *Taran Wanderer*; 1971, for *The King's Fountain*; 1982, for *Westmark*; 1991, for *The Remarkable Journey of Prince Jen*

Children's Book of the Year (Child Study Association of America): 1968, for *The High King*; 1971, for *The King's Fountain*; 1973, for *The Cat Who Wished to Be a Man*; 1974, for *The Foundling and Other Tales of Prydain*; 1975, for *The Wizard in the Tree*; 1982, for *The Kestrel*, and 1985, for *The Black Cauldron* and *Time Cat*

Newbery Medal (American Library Association): 1969, for *The High King*

Best Books of the Year Citation (Library of Congress): 1970, for *The Marvelous Misadventures of Sebastian*

National Book Award: 1971, for *The Marvelous Misadventures of Sebastian*
Drexel Award: 1972 and 1976, for outstanding contributions to literature for children
Boston Globe-Horn Book Award: 1973, for *The Cat Who Wished to Be a Man*; 1993, for *The Fortune-Tellers*
Outstanding Books of the Year Citation (*New York Times*): 1973, for *The Foundling and Other Tales of Prydain*
Best Books for Young Adults (American Library Association): 1981, for *Westmark*; 1982, for *The Kestrel*; and 1984, for *The Beggar Queen*; 1998, for *The Iron Ring*
American Book Award: 1982, for *Westmark*
Parents' Choice Award (Parents' Choice Foundation): 1982, for *The Kestrel*; 1984, for *The Beggar Queen*; 1986, for *The Illyrian Adventure*; 1991, for *The Remarkable Journey of Prince Jen*; 1992, for *The Fortune-Tellers*; 1996, for *The Arkadians*; 1998, for *The Iron Ring*
Regina Medal (Catholic Library Association): 1986
Church and Synagogue Library Association Award: 1987
Best Book Citation (*Booklist*): 1991, for *The Remarkable Journey of Prince Jen*
Golden Kite Award (Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators): 1992
Dorothy Canfield Fisher Children's Book Award: 1996, for *The Arkadians*

FURTHER READING

Books

Alexander, Lloyd. *My Love Affair with Music*, 1960
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Contemporary Authors, New Revision Series, Vol. 55, 1997
de Montreville, Doris, ed. *Third Book of Junior Authors*, 1972
Drew, Bernard A. *The 100 Most Popular Young Adult Authors*, 1996
Hipple, Ted, ed. *Writers for Young Adults*, 1997
Hopkins, Lee Bennett. *More Books by More People*, 1974
MacDonald, Ruth K., ed. *Lloyd Alexander*, 1991
Silvey, Anita, ed. *Children's Books and Their Creators*, 1995
Something about the Author, Vol. 49, 1987; Vol. 81, 1995
Something about the Author Autobiography Series, Vol. 19, 1995
Twentieth-Century Young Adult Writers, 1994
Wheeler, Jill C. *Lloyd Alexander*, 1997 (juvenile)
Who's Who in America, 1999

Periodicals

Cricket, Jan. 1973, p.74; Sep. 1973, p.76; Dec. 1976, p.22; Jan. 1977, p.54; Apr. 1989, p.34 (reprint of article from Jan. 1973); Nov. 1989, p.47
Horn Book, Aug. 1969, p.378 and 382; Oct. 1982, p.571
Language Arts, Apr. 1984, p.406
Library Journal, Feb. 17, 1969, p.1412
Philadelphia Inquirer, June 3, 1984, p.N1; June 12, 1984, p.B1; Aug. 5, 1985, p.E4; Aug. 17, 1989, p.24; Dec. 20, 1992, magazine section, p.14
School Library Journal, May 15, 1969, p.2066; Apr. 15, 1971, p.1421; Apr. 1988, p.27; Mar. 1996, p.114
Writer's Digest, Apr. 1973, p.33

ADDRESS

Penguin Putnam
Young Readers Publicity
375 Hudson
New York, NY 10014

WORLD WIDE WEB SITE

http://www.penguinputnam.com/yreaders/index/htm

Paula Danziger 1944-

American Fiction Writer for Young Adults and Children
Author of *The Cat Ate My Gymsuit, The Divorce Express,* and Stories about Matthew Martin and Amber Brown

BIRTH

Paula Danziger was born on August 18, 1944, in Washington, D.C. Her father, Samuel Danziger, worked in the city's garment district, while her mother, Carolyn (Siegel) Danziger, worked as a nurse. She also had a younger brother named Barry.

YOUTH

Danziger had an unhappy childhood, mainly due to her father. "I grew up in a family which would nowadays be called dysfunctional," she related. "My parents really cared about their kids . . . which makes it even sadder, I suppose. My father was a very angry man. He never hit my younger brother and me but was emotionally abusive." For example, Danziger remembered that her father not only refused to help her with her studies, but often went out of his way to tell her that she was not smart. "My father was a very unhappy person," she once said, "and my mother is very nervous and worried about what people thought. They weren't monsters, but it wasn't a good childhood."

Danziger's unhappiness continued after her family moved to Pennsylvania. "For years I had nightmares about the small Pennsylvania town in which I spent a substantial part of my childhood," she admitted. "We rented a farmhouse, unlikely as that sounds, because my mother was afraid of everything on the farm. I seem to remember that my brother and I were not allowed to touch anything, and were not encouraged to spend a lot of time outside—weird for kids living on a farm. I felt very isolated and buried myself in books. For the first time, I realized that my family was hardly 'The Brady Bunch,' that, in fact, my parents were very unhappy and that our family functioned with difficulty." Later, the family moved to suburban New Jersey, where Danziger attended school.

Danziger's earliest memory is of going to the library while her mother shopped. Left on her own, Danziger befriended the librarian, who first helped her pick out children's books and then helped her make the transition to young adult and adult books. The first book she can remember reading is *The Little Engine That Could,* which she says she still uses as a motivational tool today. Whenever she gets nervous, she thinks of the Little Engine's slogan: "I think I can, I think I can."

Throughout her childhood, Danziger used reading as an escape from her unhappy family life. She would read anything with words in it, from comic books to her father's books. She loved fiction (especially science fiction) and also read many popular series of books, such as the Hardy Boys and Nancy Drew. She then graduated to more mature works, such as Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women,* and finally discovered the book that became her favorite—J. D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye.* She remembers "reading it every day for three years" because it made her feel that "I wasn't alone, there was hope for me. It's when I knew I could be a writer."

Danziger showed a talent for creating stories from an early age. "While other kids had imaginary playmates, I had a follow-the-dot kingdom," she recalled. "I had the magic pencil, *with* the magic eraser, and this whole town was dependent on me. I'd make their houses for them, extra playmates. If I got angry and didn't like them, I'd erase them." Once Danziger knew she wanted to be a writer, the way she looked at the world changed. She began watching people and the way they acted, recording their behavior in her mind for later use. "My life as an author began as a small child when I realized that was what I wanted to do and started mentally recording a lot of information and observations," she noted. "That's also when I started to develop the sense of humor and the sense of perspective that allows me to write the way I do."

"I grew up in a family which would nowadays be called dysfunctional. My parents really cared about their kids . . . which makes it even sadder, I suppose. My father was a very angry man. He never hit my younger brother and me but was emotionally abusive."

EDUCATION

In elementary school, Danziger rarely pushed herself to be a good student. She gradually lost interest in her studies and claims that she stopped enjoying school around the sixth grade. After that time, she would intentionally produce papers for English class that were very well written, but on the wrong topic.

When Danziger reached high school, she wrote feature stories for the school newspaper and had a regular column in the local newspaper. This work made her believe in herself and gave her positive reinforcement she was not receiving at home. "Someone was noticing that I wasn't a total idiot," she recalled.

When she graduated from high school and thought about attending college, Danziger at first doubted that she could continue her education. "I'd been raised to believe that I was not particularly bright, not college material," she noted. "Family dynamics were such that I fell into fulfilling [my parents'] low expectations."

Despite her fears, Danziger was admitted to Montclair State Teachers College in New Jersey, where she studied education. While there, she also served as editor of the campus humor magazine, *Galumph*. During her

time at Montclair, she met poet, translator, and critic John Ciardi, who introduced her to the world of professional writing. Working as the Ciardi family babysitter, she spent several summers traveling with John, his wife Judith, and their three children to the Bread Loaf Writers Conference in Middlebury, Vermont. John Ciardi encouraged Danziger to attend workshops at the conference and also helped her with her writing. "John Ciardi taught me more than anyone else about poetry and writing. Their house was full of books, and I borrowed liberally from the shelves," she said. Ciardi also helped her understand the poetry she was trying to read. "It was the best lesson I ever had in my life. He read the poems and explained them, giving me a sense of language structure."

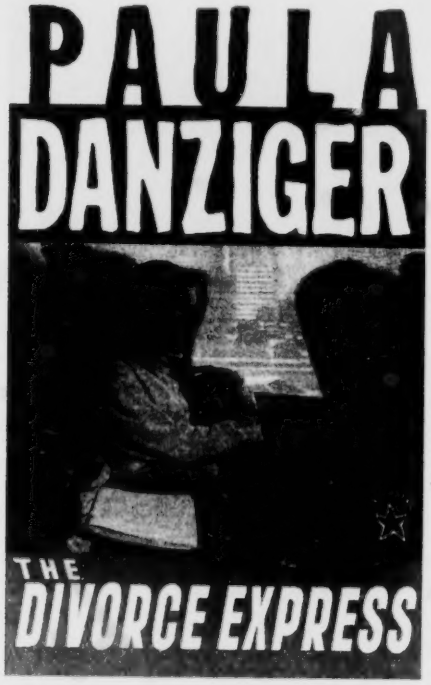
Danziger earned a bachelor's degree in English from Montclair in 1967. When she graduated, she became a teacher because she thought it was what her parents wanted her to do.

FIRST JOBS

Danziger began her career as a substitute teacher, which she called "an occupation that could have been a punishment in Dante's *Inferno*." She later became a full-time English teacher at the junior high level. She taught for three years, then went back to school to earn her master's degree. She held a number of other jobs — two graduate assistant positions and a stint as a college counselor — before returning to teaching at the junior high level. As a teacher, she says, "I also spent a lot of time listening to my students and their concerns about appearance, parents splitting up, fighting in the family, dating, [and] school pressures." Later, when she began to write, Danziger based many of the characters and situations in her books on her students and their lives.

Accidents Change Her Life

Danziger enjoyed teaching, but then her life underwent an enormous, unplanned change in 1970. First, she fell and threw her knee and shoulder out of the socket. Next, she cut the cornea of her eye with a contact lens. Then, she was involved in two serious auto accidents. In the first, she was in a car that was rear-ended by a police car. She suffered a severe case of whiplash. Just a few days later, as she was on the way to a doctor's appointment to check on her whiplash, she was in a second accident. A drunk driver crossed the center line and crashed into her car head-on. Her injuries from that accident were far more serious — she was unconscious for a few days and suffered temporary brain damage. Afterward, she had trouble reading and writing. Recovering from the accidents was a



long and difficult process. "I had recurring nightmares about the accidents and functioned with a great deal of difficulty," Danziger remembered. "My feelings of helplessness and terror dredged up a lot of material from my childhood. It was time for therapy."

Danziger initially turned to a psychiatrist to help her cope with the accidents and her painful memories of childhood. But she soon discovered that writing was the best therapy she could hope for. As she recovered from her injuries, she spent a great deal of time writing. "I felt very out of control," she said, "the last time I felt that way was when I was a kid. When you're a kid, everyone seem to be in charge, to have the right to tell you what to do, how to feel. In hospitals and schools it seems to be the same way. So I wanted to confront that." The result was her first novel, *The Cat Ate My Gymsuit*, published in 1974.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

For the past 25 years, Danziger has continued to write fiction for children and young adults. Her novels are typically set in the contemporary era and deal with real-life issues and experiences faced by kids today. Humor, honesty, teenage angst, strong characterizations, and sharp dialogue have become Danziger trademarks over the years as her writing career has flourished.

In her first book, *The Cat Ate My Gymsuit* (1974), Danziger tells the story of 13-year-old Marcy Lewis. The title of the book is one of the many witty excuses that she comes up with to avoid attending her dreaded gym class. Marcy is overweight and depressed, much like Danziger was at that age—uncomfortable with her physical appearance, unhappy in her family life, and dissatisfied with her repressive school. When Marcy becomes involved in a student protest to reinstate a popular English teacher, she grows as a person and overcomes her insecurities. *The Cat Ate My Gymsuit* has many similarities to Danziger's own life, she has said. "The book is very much my growing up. At age 12, I was put on tranquilizers

when I should have gotten help. There was nothing major and awful, I just didn't feel that my family was supportive and emotionally generous." *The Cat Ate My Gymsuit*, which was praised by reviewers and won several awards, has remained popular with young readers to this day.

Danziger's second book, *The Pistachio Prescription* (1978), confirmed that she had made the right decision by becoming a writer. It tells the story of 13-year-old Cassie, an insecure teenager who struggles with low self-esteem, poor health due to asthma, and her parents, whose marriage is falling apart. For some reason, eating pistachio nuts makes her feel better. Ultimately, Cassie learns that liking herself is the key to her happiness. The book was successful enough to allow Danziger to quit her teaching job and write full time. "The realization came that it was incredibly hard to be a good creative writer and a good creative teacher," she explained. "Each was a full-time job." She admits that she still misses teaching from time to time. "I miss working with the kids, but I don't miss the faculty meetings, taking attendance, and grading papers," she noted. "My strength as a teacher was that I really cared about kids, books, and creativity."

"My life as an author began as a small child when I realized that was what I wanted to do and started mentally recording a lot of information and observations. That's also when I started to develop the sense of humor and the sense of perspective that allows me to write the way I do."

Novels for Young Adults

Danziger followed up those early works with a succession of popular and successful novels for young adults. *Can You Sue Your Parents for Malpractice?* (1979) features 14-year-old Lauren Allen, a ninth grader who is struggling with her relationship with her parents. Lauren feels that she has no power and no right to make decisions—until she takes a class in "Law for Children and Young People" and begins to challenge her family's rules. Ultimately, she learns to make decisions that are right for her. In *There's a Bat in Bunk Five* (1980), Danziger brought back Marcy Lewis from *The Cat Ate My Gymsuit*. Marcy's relationship with her father has improved somewhat, and she convinces him to let her spend the summer away from home as a counselor at a camp run by her former favorite teacher. In the process, Marcy learns about developing independence, self confidence, and the desire to help others.

Danziger's next two books, *The Divorce Express* (1982) and *It's an Aardvark-Eat-Turtle World* (1985), deal with Phoebe Brooks and Rosie Wilson. These two teenage friends are each struggling with their parents' divorces. Phoebe's parents have just recently split up, and she's unhappy that she is being forced to shuttle back and forth between her mother and her father's homes. Rosie, meanwhile, has had more time to adjust to the divorce, but she also has to deal with racial issues as a bi-racial child of a mixed marriage. By the second novel, the two friends are not sure they're happy with the situation when Phoebe's father and Rosie's mother decide to combine households, causing Phoebe to respond with anger and rebelliousness.

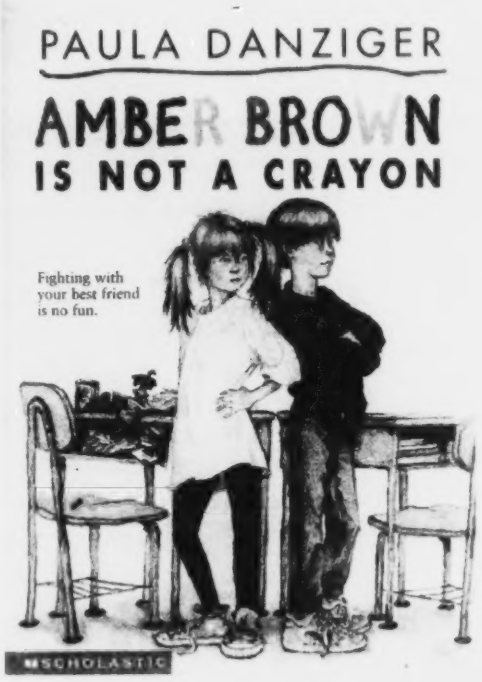
Danziger tried something new in *This Place Has No Atmosphere* (1986), a science fiction novel set in the year 2057. It's a different world for 15-year-old Aurora: although pimples and cliques still exist, people live in malls and take classes in ESP. Aurora is part of the coolest group at school and she just started dating the best-looking guy in ninth grade. Aurora loves her life—until her parents announce that the family is moving to the moon. Despite the different setting, Danziger still used humor to deal with the same kinds of difficulties faced by teens in her other novels.

Danziger returned to more familiar turf with *Remember Me to Harold Square* (1987), set in New York, and *Thames Doesn't Rhyme with James* (1994), set in London. These companion volumes feature Kendra, her annoying little brother Oscar, and her new friend, Frank. In the first, Kendra is dismayed when her parents announce that they are inviting Frank to stay with them in New York and that they are setting up a scavenger hunt for them all over New York City, from the Empire State Building to the United Nations. Kendra expects it to be a disaster, until she meets Frank. The second book finds Kendra and Frank in London, where her parents have planned another scavenger hunt.

Novels for Younger Readers

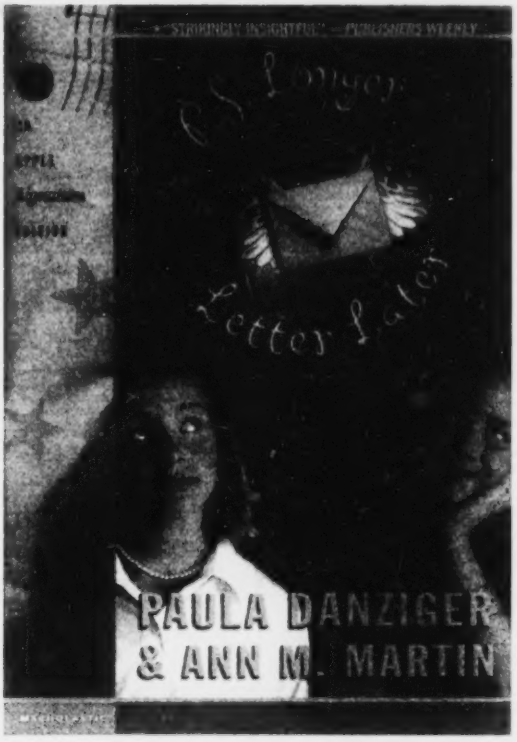
Danziger has also created two series of books for slightly younger kids. In 1989 she started a series about 11-year-old Matthew Martin, which includes four books: *Everyone Else's Parents Said Yes* (1989), *Make Like a Tree and Leave* (1990), *Earth to Matthew* (1992), and *Not for a Billion Gazillion Dollars* (1992). Matthew is a misunderstood sixth grader who tends to get in trouble with his parents, teachers, and even his friends. Each book focuses on his experiences, sometimes funny, sometimes serious: his birthday party being picketed by girls, a fight with his best friend, a school project that gets him in trouble, a period of change involving his desire to be taken seriously and his feelings about his good friend Jil! Hudson, and a host of wild schemes to make money.

In 1994, Danziger started a series of books for younger readers starring Amber Brown; there are eight books in the Amber Brown series to date. Funny and vulnerable, Amber is in third and later fourth grades in the books. She's younger than Danziger's other protagonists, but these books share with those for older readers the typical Danziger insight, sensitivity, and intuitive connection with kids. As always, she introduces difficult issues that are important to her readers: a best friend moving away, chicken pox, divorce, custody battles, blended families, and school traumas. And again as always, these difficult issues are mixed with humor for comic relief. Danziger once explained that she learned this approach from her mentor, John Ciardi. He suggested to her that she analyze a poem by underlining the funny lines in red and the sad lines in blue. The result, he said, was purple. "That's what I always write toward," Danziger said, "that mixture. I think that's why Amber Brown works: the books are funny and sad, and that's what people respond to."



P.S. Longer Letter Later

In 1998, Danziger collaborated with the popular young adult author Ann Martin, author of *The Baby-Sitters Club* series. In their book *P.S. Longer Letter Later: A Novel in Letters*, Danziger and Martin take on the voices of two 12-year-old girls, best friends who



correspond via letters when one of the girls moves to a new town. The book was written with no outline or plan—each writer simply reacted to what the other wrote as they actually exchanged (via fax) the letters that appear in the book. For the authors, who had been friends for ten years, the novel offered a unique opportunity to work together. "The idea to do a novel in letters thrilled us," Martin said. "The characters are very similar to ourselves, so naturally, our personalities spill over into the book."

In the book, Danziger provides the voice of Tara*Starr (as she signs her letters), while Martin portrays Elizabeth. Tara is extroverted, zany, melodramatic, and always seeking attention. Elizabeth is her opposite—shy, responsible, and diligent with her school work. Tara's family has little money, while Elizabeth's is quite wealthy, at least when the novel starts—but money becomes tight later when Elizabeth's father loses his job. The letters the two girls exchange reflect the highs and lows of their long-distance friendship. "The strength of the book is the struggle," Danziger said, referring to both the problems that Tara and Elizabeth face and the difficulties that she and Martin encountered as they wrote the book. "One of the strongest themes in the book is that people and relationships change—not only in adolescence, but throughout life. We also wanted to explore how distance changes friendships, but doesn't end them." The authors plan to write a sequel to *P.S. Longer Letter Later* called *Snail Mail—No More.* In this book, Tara and Elizabeth will switch their correspondence to e-mail instead of regular letters.

Danziger has now sold more than one million copies of her books. Even with her financial and critical success as a writer, she still thinks back to her days in the classroom with fondness. "Teaching was and continues to be one of the most important influences on what I do," she noted. It is also a fertile source of material. Her days as a teacher have provided her with real-life experiences that have found their way into her books,

helped her with character development, and allowed her to develop a sense of place—school—that all teenagers can relate to. Danziger also jokes that teaching has become a motivational tool that helps her get over writer's block. Any time she gets stuck, she always says to herself, "'Well, Paula. . . . You can always go back to teaching.' That's usually enough to get me started writing again."

Empathizing with Young Readers

In all these books, Danziger is known for her strong narrative voice, often in the first person, her fast-paced writing style, her ability to identify with her teenage heroines, and her quick wit and snappy one-liners. Her books have tackled such serious issues as women's rights, young people's rights, divorce, homelessness, and the environment. In a review of Danziger's first book, *The Cat Ate My Gymsuit*, Alleen Pace Nilsen described her writing style and explained why her books are so popular with young adults, especially girls. Nilsen made these comments 25 years ago, but they still hold true today. "Danziger's plots center around young teenage girls faced with the problems of establishing a grownup identity separate from their parents and different from what they were as children," Nilsen wrote. "She treats this basically serious theme with enough humor that teenagers begin to smile at themselves and come away from her books a little more confident that they too will make it."

> *"There is so much in life that is hard and sad and difficult and there is so much in life that is . . . joyous and funny. There's also a lot in-between those two extremes. As a writer, I try to take all of those things and put them together. That way people can say, 'I know that feeling' and identify with it."*

Some reviewers have criticized Danziger's books for being lightweight and for not tackling important issues in a serious manner. In fact, one critic went so far as to say that "It seems that readers who like these books prefer cliches to carefully described experience." But Danziger brushes off the criticism, confident in her own abilities and in her writing style. "I basically don't listen to critics," she stated. "I listen to my editor and to friends whose opinions I trust. If I were to define myself according to what reviewers said about my work, I'd be in deep trouble. I am aware

"All writers write from deep experience. For me, that is childhood. From it flow feelings of vulnerability, compassion, and strength. Perhaps it would be better to say that I write 'of' young people rather than 'for' or 'to' them. Writers tell the best stories we possibly can, hopefully in ways that others will like. Most important to me is that writing allows me to use my sense of humor and sense of perspective. I hope that my books continue to help me grow and help others grow."

that certain critics have said my books are 'light.' I know that certain critics have been discomforted by my sense of humor and the attention I pay to controversial matters: the Holocaust, the homeless, divorce, biracial kids, and so on. Sometimes I really wonder; a number of reviewers don't seem to like kids or books. Why do they do what they do?"

One of Danziger's main reasons for writing these types of books is to help kids feel less alone in the world, to let them know that there are others feeling the same things they do. She believes that "a book can make a very good friend" to lonely kids. "There is so much in life that is hard and sad and difficult and there is so much in life that is . . . joyous and funny. There's also a lot in-between those two extremes. As a writer, I try to take all of those things and put them together. That way people can say, 'I know that feeling' and identify with it," she explained. "All writers write from deep experience. For me, that is childhood. From it flow feelings of vulnerability, compassion, and strength. Perhaps it would be better to say that I write 'of' young people rather than 'for' or 'to' them. Writers tell the best stories we possibly can, hopefully in ways that others will like. Most important to me is that writing allows me to use my sense of humor and sense of perspective. I hope that my books continue to help me grow and help others grow."

PAULA DANZIGER'S TOP 10 TIPS FOR ANYONE WHO WANTS TO BE A WRITER

1. Read as much as you can.
2. Write and rewrite.
3. Read your work aloud.
4. Let trusted people look at your work and offer suggestions.

5. Take acting lessons. (It'll teach you a lot about character development.)
6. Observe people.
7. Eavesdrop.
8. Don't be afraid of not being perfect.
9. Remember that the most important thing that you can create is the kind of person you are and you become.
10. Don't eat tuna fish salad with mayo if it's been out in the sun too long.

HOME AND FAMILY

Danziger has never been married. While she has no children of her own, she considers herself to be a "world-class aunt" to her three nephews and one niece. She has homes in New York City and in Woodstock, New York, and she also spends a lot of time in London.

HOBBIES AND OTHER INTERESTS

Danziger remains busy when she is not writing. She is well-known for her flamboyant personality and dress and is in great demand as a speaker. She has hosted her own television show in England, and regularly travels the world to talk about her books, which have been translated into more than a dozen languages. In fact, she logs about 30,000 miles on airplanes each year while traveling to promote her works and meet with students.

Danziger has received so much praise for thinking like a teenager in her writing that it is no surprise that many of her hobbies are shared by kids. She loves playing video games, spending time with friends, and playing jacks. She also loves to collect things, including stickers, antique purses, salt-and-pepper shakers, and bad jokes. But perhaps her favorite hobby is shopping. "I live for malls," she admitted.

WRITINGS

The Cat Ate My Gymsuit, 1974
The Pistachio Prescription, 1978
Can You Sue Your Parents for Malpractice?, 1979
There's a Bat in Bunk Five, 1980
The Divorce Express, 1982
It's an Aardvark-Eat-Turtle World, 1985
This Place Has No Atmosphere, 1986
Remember Me to Harold Square, 1987
Thames Doesn't Rhyme with James, 1994
P.S. Longer Letter Later: A Novel in Letters, 1998 (with Ann M. Martin)

Matthew Martin Series

Everyone Else's Parents Said Yes, 1989
Make Like a Tree and Leave, 1990
Earth to Matthew, 1992
Not for a Billion Gazillion Dollars, 1992

Amber Brown Series

Amber Brown Is Not a Crayon, 1994
You Can't Eat Your Chicken Pox, Amber Brown, 1995
Amber Brown Goes Fourth, 1995
Forever Amber Brown, 1996
Amber Brown Wants Extra Credit, 1996
Amber Brown Sees Red, 1997
Amber Brown Is Feeling Blue, 1998
I, Amber Brown, 1999

HONORS AND AWARDS

Children's Book of the Year Citation (Child Study Association of America): 1978, for *The Pistachio Prescription;* 1985, for *It's an Aardvark-Eat-Turtle World*
Children's Choice Award (International Reading Association and the Children's Book Council): 1979, for *The Pistachio Prescription;* 1980, for *The Cat Ate My Gymsuit* and *Can You Sue Your Parents for Malpractice?;* 1981, for *There's a Bat in Bunk Five;* 1983, for *The Divorce Express*
Parent's Choice Award for Literature (Parent's Choice Foundation): 1982, for *The Divorce Express;* 1985, for *It's an Aardvark-Eat-Turtle World*
Young Reader's Medal: 1984, for *There's a Bat in Bunk Five*

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Publishers Weekly, July 19, 1991, p.37
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Teaching Pre K-8, Nov. 1995, p.44
Writer's Digest, Jan. 1990, p.39

ADDRESS

Penguin Putnam
Young Readers Publicity
375 Hudson
New York, NY 10014

WORLD WIDE WEB SITES

http://www.penguinputnam.com
http://www.scholastic.com

Nancy Farmer 1941-

American Writer of Books for Children and Young Adults

Author of *The Ear, the Eye, and the Arm*, *The Warm Place*, and *A Girl Named Disaster*

BIRTH

Nancy Farmer was born Nancy Coe on July 9, 1941, in Phoenix, Arizona. According to Farmer, her father, Elmon Frank Coe, was "at various times in his life a cowboy, a sergeant in the army, a lawyer, and a manager, in successive jobs, of a tuberculosis sanatorium, a tavern, and a hotel." Her

mother, Sarah (Marimon) Coe, stayed home to care for Nancy and her two older siblings.

YOUTH

By the time Nancy was born, her father was working as a hotel manager in Yuma, Arizona, near the U.S.-Mexican border. She spent her childhood in this environment, which helped her develop an early interest in storytelling. "Every night until past midnight I listened to stories from truck drivers, cowboys, and railroad workers," she recalled. "My father took me to the American Legion hall on bingo nights, and I heard a lot more stories there. People were able to spin tales back then, and they taught me a lot." Farmer worked at the hotel desk beginning at the age of nine. She enjoyed talking to people from all walks of life as she rented them rooms. "Life there was a wonderful preparation for writing," she stated.

Farmer developed her interest in storytelling at the hotel where her father was working as a manager. "Every night until past midnight I listened to stories from truck drivers, cowboys, and railroad workers. My father took me to the American Legion hall on bingo nights, and I heard a lot more stories there. People were able to spin tales back then, and they taught me a lot."

EDUCATION

As a girl, Farmer did not show much interest in school. In fact, she often played hooky and once missed an entire year of school. Whenever she chose to apply herself, however, she proved to be a good student. After graduating from high school, she attended Phoenix College for two years, earning an associate's degree in 1961. She then moved to Portland, Oregon, where she completed her bachelor's degree at Reed College in 1963.

Shortly after graduating from college, Farmer joined the Peace Corps. This volunteer organization, established by President John F. Kennedy in 1961, sends young Americans to developing nations to provide skilled assistance to people in need. Farmer once joked that "I became a Peace Corps volunteer because I wanted to go to India and meet a rich Maharajah. Of course, I didn't tell the Peace Corps that." In reality, she learned the Hindi

It was during her years in Africa that Farmer decided to become a writer. One day, she received a burst of inspiration and wrote a story in three hours. "Since that time I have been absolutely possessed with the desire to write. I can't explain it, only that everything up to then was a preparation for my real vocation."

language and was sent to a village in India, where she was supposed to teach English to the local people. As it turned out, however, she was accidentally sent to a part of India where "they threw rocks at anyone who spoke Hindi." Instead of teaching English, she studied a textbook and taught chemistry. Her term of service with the Peace Corps lasted from 1963 to 1965. After it ended, she spent another two years traveling abroad.

In 1967, Farmer returned to the United States and settled in California. She soon found a job as a laboratory technician in the field of insect pathology (the study of diseases affecting insects). "All I knew was that bugs had more legs than cows, but my boss wanted someone who wouldn't talk back to him," she admitted. "This was fine with me. He was an excellent teacher." She ended up doing lab work for the next four years while she also took college courses in chemistry at Merrit College in Oakland and the University of California at Berkeley. She ended her studies in 1971 without earning an advanced degree.

EARLY JOBS

By 1971, Farmer once again found herself longing to travel. She made plans with a friend to go around the world by boat. "We planned to sail from port to port, get jobs when we ran out of money, and hopefully meet a lonely Greek shipping tycoon," she noted. But their plan fell apart almost immediately. They had made arrangements to leave San Francisco aboard a yacht, but as soon as the boat left the harbor the Coast Guard intercepted it and arrested the captain. It turned out that the yacht was stolen. Farmer and her friend were disappointed that their trip ended so abruptly, but they were also relieved that they had not sailed onto the open ocean with pirates who might have thrown them overboard at any time.

Despite these early problems, Farmer soon made arrangements to travel to Africa on board a freighter. "If one is interested in bugs, the natural place to visit is Africa, which has the biggest and meanest bugs in the world," she noted. Once she arrived, she found work as a scientist. From 1972 to 1974, she had a job running a laboratory on a large lake in the country of Mozambique. "This was an absolutely wonderful job," she related. "I spent two weeks every month sailing around the lake in a little boat in the wildest country that exists on the planet. One of my chores was to visit remote villages, to be sure their water supplies were safe. I saw a lot of things that were completely mysterious." Her travels gave her a great appreciation for the complexities of African culture.

In 1975, Farmer moved to Zimbabwe and found a job as a lab technician at the University of Zimbabwe in Rukomeche. One year later, while she was working there, she met her husband, Harold Farmer, who was teaching literature at the university. They fell in love and got married only a week after they met. Their son, Daniel, was born in Zimbabwe in 1978. That same year she left her job at the university to become a freelance scientist in Harare, Zimbabwe. Farmer and her husband remained in central Africa until 1988.

CHOOSING A CAREER

It was during her years in Africa that Farmer decided to become a writer. She came upon this career path in a most unusual way. One day, as she sat reading a novel, she received a burst of inspiration. She suddenly felt as if she could write a book herself. So she sat down and completed a story in three hours. She enjoyed the experience so much that she began writing daily. "Since that time I have been absolutely possessed with the desire to write," she stated. "I can't explain it, only that everything up to then was a preparation for my real vocation."

Some of the local tribespeople offered Farmer an explanation for her sudden decision to become a writer. "According to the Shona, the Afri-

> *"According to the Shona, the Africans among whom we lived, I had been visited by a* **shave** *(shah-vay) or wandering spirit.* **Shaves** *come from people who haven't received proper burial rites. They drift around until they find a likely host, possess whoever it is, and teach him or her a skill. In my case I got a traditional storyteller."*

cans among whom we lived, I had been visited by a *shave* (shah-vay) or wandering spirit," she explained. "*Shaves* come from people who haven't received proper burial rites. They drift around until they find a likely host, possess whoever it is, and teach him or her a skill. In my case I got a traditional storyteller."

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

Despite the help of her *shave,* Farmer still had to work hard to become a good writer. In fact, she spent four years improving her writing skills and studying the work of such authors as Roald Dahl, J.R.R. Tolkien, and Stephen King. "The horrible truth is that one's first efforts are amateurish," she admitted. "It takes time, practice, and objectivity to correct this problem. I have never understood why people think they can write well without effort. No one expects a first-year medical student to transplant a kidney."

Farmer's first books for children, *Lorelei* and *Tsitsi's Skirt,* were published in Africa in 1988. Also in that year, she submitted a story to a contest and won $4,000 in prize money. The money allowed her to move to California with her husband and son. But they struggled to make ends meet during their early years back in the United States. "We were so poor we couldn't even afford heat in the winter, let alone frills like beds," she explained. "We bundled up together on the floor under a heap of yard-sale blankets." Farmer worked at a laboratory at Stanford University for a while. Then she received a National Endowment for the Arts grant, which allowed her to become a full-time writer in 1992.

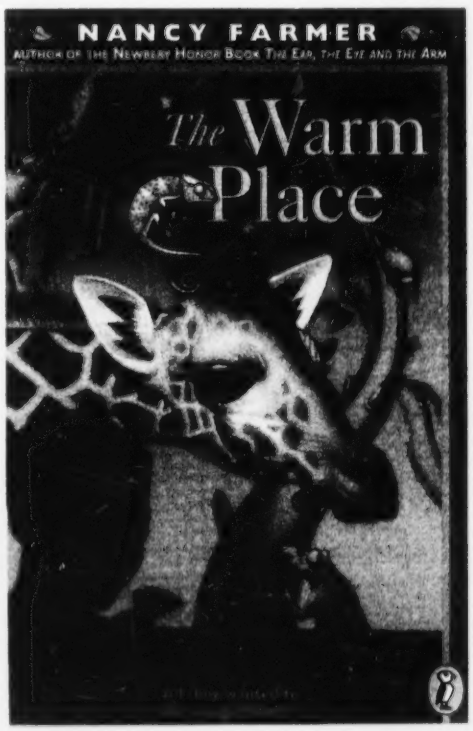
Becoming a Full-Time Children's Writer

In 1993 Farmer published her first book in the United States, a young adult novel called *Do You Know Me.* This book tells the story of a young Zimbabwean girl named Tapiwa who lives in the city with her middle-class family and attends an elite private school. Tapiwa's life is turned up-

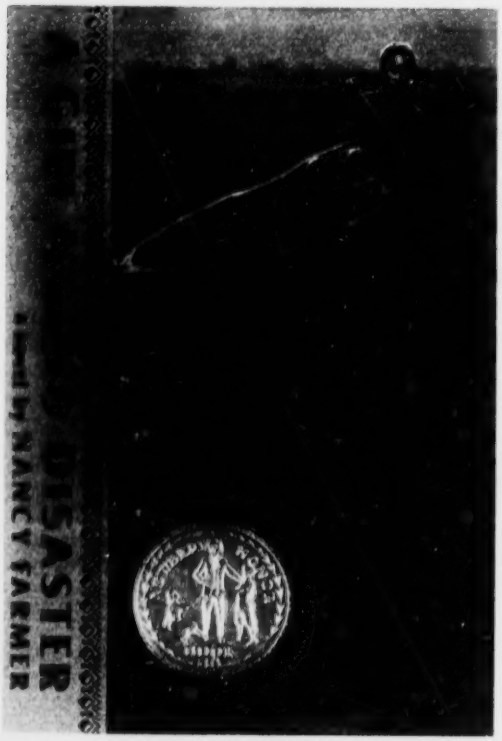
side down when her uncle leaves his home in a small, traditional African village and comes to live with her family. He causes all kinds of mischief with his unpredictable behavior and wild schemes. His presence also allows a farcical look at a more serious theme, the clash between the family's middle-class culture and the traditions of the uncle's village life. "In this impressive first book [Farmer] displays an astute ear for dialogue, a deft hand with plot twists, and a keen, dry wit," wrote a reviewer for *Publishers Weekly*. "Tapiwa could be the girl next door, [but] she is also a most interesting window on a culture seldom seen in children's books."

The Ear, the Eye, and the Arm

In 1994, Farmer published one of her best known works, a science-fiction adventure entitled *The Ear, the Eye, and the Arm*. The American edition was actually a rewritten version of a novel she had published in Africa in 1989. This futuristic story is set in Zimbabwe in the year 2194. It concerns three siblings who have lived a very sheltered life as the children of the country's military ruler. One day, they set out on their own to explore the city. As the kids get into and out of a series of scrapes they are pursued by three mutant detectives with special powers, known as the Ear, the Eye, and the Arm. The book is suspenseful, funny, and imaginative, with elements of fantasy woven together with African tribal lore. "Farmer's impeccable creation of the futuristic society is a remarkable achievement," Anne Deifendeifer wrote in *Horn Book*. "The fully developed, unique characters struggle with personal issues—courage, the discovery of latent abilities, relationships among family members—that are meaningful to young adults of any era." *The Ear, the Eye, and the Arm* was nominated for several awards, including the prestigious Newbery Medal.



Farmer followed the success of this young adult novel with two books for younger children. *The Warm Place*, published in 1995, is for children ages eight to twelve. It tells the story of Ruva, a young giraffe who lives peacefully with her mother until she is kidnaped by



> *Farmer had to work hard to become a good writer. "The horrible truth is that one's first efforts are amateurish. It takes time, practice, and objectivity to correct this problem. I have never understood why people think they can write well without effort. No one expects a first-year medical student to transplant a kidney."*

poachers and shipped to a zoo in San Francisco. There, Ruva joins up with the wise rats Troll and Rodentus, a magical chameleon named Nelson, and Jabila, a boy who was also kidnaped, to try to outwit their captors and return home. *Runnery Granary,* published in 1996, was written for even younger children. It's a picture book about a medieval woman who struggles to prevent troublesome gnomes from eating her grain.

A Girl Named Disaster

Also in 1996, Farmer published another award-winning young adult novel, *A Girl Named Disaster.* It tells the story of Nhamo, an 11-year-old girl from a small village in Mozambique. When a cholera epidemic strikes her village, the elders decide that it has been caused by an angry spirit. They order Nhamo to marry an evil man in order to get rid of the curse. Instead, she flees to Zimbabwe in search of her father's family. But her boat drifts off course, turning her two-day trip into a year-long journey through wilderness in which she must use all of her resources to survive. The suspenseful tale about the terrors Nhamo encounters is adroitly interwoven with information about the folktales and spiritual beliefs of the Shona, the largest ethnic group in Zimbabwe. "The author's skill makes the setting real and nonexotic even as the reader learns an amazing

amount about survival techniques, Shona culture, and Zimbabwean politics," Martha V. Parravano wrote in *Horn Book*. "Nhamo herself is a stunning creation," added a *Publishers Weekly* reviewer. "While she serves as a fictional ambassador from a foreign culture, she is supremely human."

Although Farmer has lived in California for ten years, her work continues to be influenced by her time in Africa. "The character, viewpoint, and zany sense of humor of the people I met there have had a major effect on my writing," she noted. She always tells aspiring writers to read a wide variety of things, write as much as possible for several years, and keep sending out manuscripts to editors. "Sooner or later you will find one who loves your particular style," she stated.

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

Nancy Coe married Harold Farmer, a poet and teacher of literature, in Zimbabwe in 1976. They have one son, Daniel, who was born in 1978. The author and her family now reside in Menlo Park, California.

HOBBIES AND OTHER INTERESTS

Farmer continues to study African culture and history, and she enjoys studying new topics, including marine biology, criminology, and ethology (the study of human morals and guiding beliefs).

WRITINGS

Lorelei, 1988
Tsitsi's Skirt, 1988
The Ear, the Eye, and the Arm, 1989
Tapiwa's Uncle, 1992
Do You Know Me, 1993
The Warm Place, 1995
Runnery Granary, 1996
A Girl Named Disaster, 1996

HONORS AND AWARDS

National Endowment for the Arts Grant: 1992
Notable Children's Book Award (American Library Association): 1995, for *The Ear, the Eye, and the Arm*
Best Book for Young Adults (American Library Association): 1997, for *A Girl Named Disaster*

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Contemporary Authors, Vol. 167, 1999
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Something about the Author, Vol. 79, 1995

ADDRESS

Orchard Books
95 Madison Ave.
New York, NY 10016

RETROSPECTIVE

Zora Neale Hurston 1891?-1960

American Novelist, Short Story Writer, Folklorist, and Anthropologist
Author of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *Mules and Men*

BIRTH

Zora Neale Hurston was most likely born on January 7, 1891, in Notasulga, Alabama. Few facts about her birth are available. During her lifetime, she claimed to have been born in several different years, ranging from 1898 to 1910. She also

claimed that she had been born in Eatonville, Florida, where she spent most of her childhood. But an old family Bible that was discovered in the late 1980s suggested that Hurston was born in Alabama in 1891 and taken to Florida at an early age.

Zora was the fifth of eight children born to Lucy Ann (Potts) Hurston, a country schoolteacher, and John Hurston, a carpenter, Baptist minister, and leader in their Florida community. She had three older brothers (Hezekiah, John, and Richard), three younger brothers (Clifford, Benjamin, and Edward), and one older sister (Sarah).

"As early as I can remember, it was the habit of the men folks particularly to gather on the store porch of evenings and swap stories. Even the women folks would stop and break a breath with them at times. As a child, when I was sent down to Joe Clarke's store, I'd drag out my leaving as long as possible in order to hear more."

YOUTH

Hurston's parents moved to Eatonville, Florida, shortly after the town was founded. It was the first all-black community in the United States to be allowed to govern itself. "I was born in a Negro town," Hurston once wrote. "I do not mean by that the black backside of an average town. Eatonville, Florida, is . . . a pure Negro town—charter, mayor, council, town marshal and all. It was not the first Negro community in America, but it was the first to be incorporated, the first attempt at organized self-government on the part of Negroes in America." Thousands of African-Americans flocked to Eatonville around the turn of the century. They were excited to take part in local government, run their own farms and businesses, and raise their families surrounded by black culture. The Hurstons bought a five-acre farm in Eatonville.

Zora was a talkative and energetic child. She enjoyed playing outdoors and picking fruit off the many trees on her family's land. But her father often lost patience with her. He felt that "It did not do for Negroes to have too much spirit. The white folks were not going to stand for it." Her mother, though, was very loving and supportive. Lucy Hurston encouraged all of her children to "jump at the sun," meaning that they should set high goals and work hard to achieve them. She also taught her children to read before they started school. Zora especially liked reading Bible

stories as a child. Once, when she was in elementary school, she was invited to read aloud for some white women who were visiting her class. The women were so impressed by her reading ability that they sent her a big box of books as a gift. Her favorite stories were the myths about ancient Greeks and Romans.

In her spare time, Hurston liked to hang around the porch of Eatonville's general store and listen to town residents telling stories and singing. "As early as I can remember, it was the habit of the men folks particularly to gather on the store porch of evenings and swap stories," she recalled. "Even the women folks would stop and break a breath with them at times. As a child, when I was sent down to Joe Clarke's store, I'd drag out my leaving as long as possible in order to hear more." Years later, Hurston would learn that the stories and songs she enjoyed as a child were an important part of African-American culture in the South. She ended up studying these and other aspects of black culture as an anthropologist.

EDUCATION

As a child, Hurston attended Hungerford Elementary School in Eatonville. She enjoyed school and was a good student. But her happy youth came to an end in 1904, when she was in her early teens. Her beloved mother died, and her family began to fall apart. Her father was not able to care for the children by himself, so he sent Zora and several of her siblings away to school in Jacksonville, Florida. Like most other southern American cities in those days, Jacksonville had laws that segregated people by race. For example, white people and "colored" people were required to use separate restrooms, drinking fountains, schools, theaters, and restaurants. Known as "Jim Crow" laws, these laws discriminated against blacks and placed them in an inferior position in society. Since she had grown up as part of a respected family in a small, all-black town, Hurston had never experienced racism before. She suddenly felt different, rejected, and alone. "Jacksonville made me know that I was a little colored girl," she remembered.

Despite her loneliness, Hurston liked her new school. She was a good student, although she often got in trouble for talking back to teachers. During the middle of the school year, her father married a woman who wanted nothing to do with his children. John Hurston gave in to his new wife's demands, and he stopped sending money to pay their school bills. Hurston had to work cleaning the school in Jacksonville in order to continue studying there. When summer break came, her father refused to come get her. Instead, he wrote a letter to the school and asked if they could adopt her. Eventually, the principal gave her the money to go home.

Hurston returned to Eatonville to find a terrible situation in her family. None of the children could get along with their stepmother. Several of Hurston's older siblings had already left home to find jobs and make their own way in life. Hurston and the younger children were sent off to live with their mother's friends and relatives. She remembered that she was passed around "like a bad penny" over the next few years. She could not afford to return to school. It was an upsetting life for a teenager. "I wanted family love and peace and a resting place," Hurston noted. "I wanted books and school."

Hurston began working as a maid to support herself. After a series of jobs cleaning houses, she got a position as a private maid to the lead singer of a traveling musical company. She spent more than a year traveling with her new employer, seeing the country and enjoying theater life. After that, there's a period of about five years unaccounted for in biographies of her life, during which Hurston's activities are unknown.

Returning to School

In 1917, when she was about 26 years old, Hurston enrolled as a junior at Morgan Academy, a high school in Baltimore, Maryland. Although she was much older than the other students, she worked hard, got good grades, and became very popular. Since she did not have much money, she could only afford one dress and wore it to school every day. When the other students would jokingly ask what she planned to wear the next day, however, she would always describe some beautiful and exotic outfit.

After graduating from Morgan in 1918, Hurston applied for admission to Howard University in Washington, D.C., one of the best all-black colleges in the country. She was accepted and entered as a freshman in 1919. She worked at a variety of jobs to pay the tuition, including as a waitress and a manicurist. Because she had to work full-time, she only managed to complete two years' worth of course work between 1919 and 1924, when she left Howard.

During her years at Howard, Hurston began writing stories about African-American life in the South. A few of her stories were published in a new magazine called *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life*. The editor of *Opportunity* recognized Hurston's talent and encouraged her to move to New York City, where many talented young black artists and writers lived. Hurston decided to "jump at the sun" and take the chance of moving to New York. It was a move that took a lot of courage. "The first week of January, 1925, found me in New York with $1.50, no job, no friends, and a lot of hope," she recalled.

The Harlem Renaissance

Hurston lived in an area of New York City called Harlem. At the time she arrived, Harlem was undergoing a cultural renaissance. Black political and social leaders, like Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois, were demanding equality for African-Americans. Numerous black artists, musicians, and writers flocked to Harlem and began producing exciting new works that were inspired by the changes then taking place in society. Hurston soon became a prominent figure in the black literary and artistic movement that became known as the Harlem Renaissance. Shortly after she arrived in Harlem in 1925, she won awards for a story, "Spunk," and a play, *Color Struck*, that she had published in *Opportunity*. At the awards banquet, she met other black artists as well as wealthy white supporters of the arts. Before long, the promising young writer was invited to all the major parties and events in Harlem. People loved her lively personality, her flamboyant way of dressing, and her wild stories about growing up in the South.

> *"I am not tragically colored. There is no great sorrow dammed up in my soul, nor lurking behind my eyes. I do not mind at all. I do not belong to the sobbing school of Negrohood who hold that nature has given them a low-down dirty deal and whose feelings are all hurt about it."*

During this time, Hurston befriended Annie Nathan Meyer, a founder of Barnard College in New York City. Meyer gave her a scholarship to attend college. In the fall of 1925, Hurston enrolled at Barnard College, becoming the only black student at the all-women's school. Although she majored in English, she also became interested in anthropology (the study of human

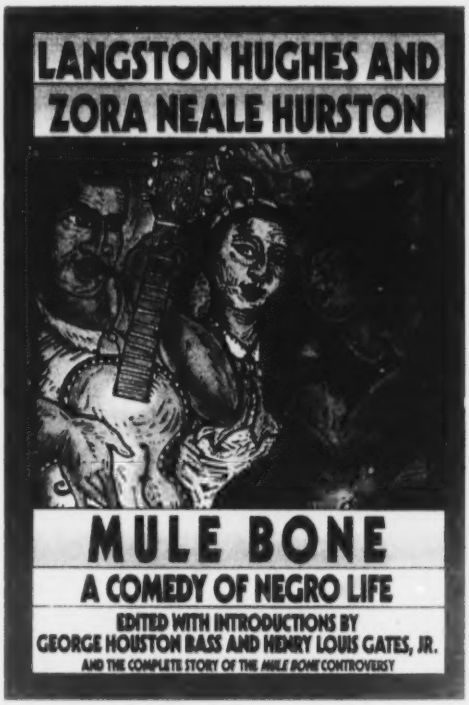
cultures) when she took a course in the subject with Franz Boas, a famous and respected anthropologist. Boas helped Hurston realize that she had spent her whole life studying African-American folklore, including the customs, stories, and art forms of her people. It was a revelation for Hurston. "From the earliest rocking of my cradle, I had known about the capers Brer Rabbit is apt to cut and what the Squinch Owl says from the house top. But it was fitting me like a tight chemise. I couldn't see it for wearing it," she wrote. "It was only when I was off in college, away from my native surroundings, that I could see myself like somebody else and stand off and look at my garment. Then I had to have the spy-glass of Anthropology to look through at that." Boas encouraged her to complete a formal study of black culture in the South as part of her course work. Soon after, she secured the patronage of a wealthy white woman named Charlotte Mason, who agreed to fund Hurston's travels for anthropological field work.

In 1926, Hurston began field work in anthropology in Harlem. In early 1927, she arranged to travel around the South to interview black residents and collect their traditional stories and songs. Since she had been raised in the South, she expected to have no problem meeting people and gaining their trust. But it turned out to be more difficult than she had imagined. After all, Hurston had been away from the South for a long time, and many people suspiciously regarded her as an outsider. "Folklore is not as easy to collect as it sounds," she stated. "The best source is where there are the least outside influences and these people, being usually underprivileged, are the shyest. They are most reluctant at times to reveal that which the soul lives by." By the end of 1927, however, Hurston had succeeded in collecting folklore in Eatonville and other areas of the South. She earned her bachelor of arts (B.A.) degree in English from Barnard in 1928. She continued doing graduate work in anthropology off and on for the next few years, but she never completed an advanced degree.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

Hurston was one of the most renowned African-American authors and the most published black female author of her time. She celebrated black life with humor, realism, and originality at a time when few writers were interested in African-American cultural life. A prolific writer, Hurston wrote in a wide variety of genres, including plays, short stories, novels, folklore collections, essays, and an autobiography. Of these, her novel *Their Eyes Are Watching God* is considered her finest work. But all of her works are said to show her gift for storytelling, her knowledge and appreciation of African-Americans folk customs, her metaphorical language, and her sense of humor.

Mule Bone


LANGSTON HUGHES AND
ZORA NEALE HURSTON
MULE BONE
A COMEDY OF NEGRO LIFE
EDITED WITH INTRODUCTIONS BY
GEORGE HOUSTON BASS AND HENRY LOUIS GATES, JR.
AND THE COMPLETE STORY OF THE MULE BONE CONTROVERSY

During the 1930s, Hurston spent much of her time writing and traveling. One of her projects was a play called *Mule Bone*. She worked on this three-act play in 1930 with another important black writer of the Harlem Renaissance, Langston Hughes. She and Hughes had been friends for several years by that point; they had discussed several collaborations and had started up a magazine together called *Fire!*, which didn't last long. At first, they communicated in letters about their work. Hurston wrote to Hughes about her desire to work on a play that would be culturally authentic: "Did I tell you before I left about the new, the *real* Negro theatre I plan? Well, I shall, or rather we shall act out the folk tales, however short, with the abrupt angularity and naivete of the primitive [Alabama] nigger. Quote that with native settings. What do you think?"

For their play *Mule Bone*, Hurston and Hughes decided to adapt a folktale called "The Bone of Contention," which Hurston had collected from her hometown of Eatonville, Florida. Unlike other contrived images of African-Americans, according to critic George Houston Bass, "the authors envisioned their play as an 'authentic' portrayal of black comic characters and the rich uses of language and laughter southern black folk had invented as a way of creatively coping with the harshness of being black in America. . . . With Hurston's mastery of the vernacular and compelling sense of story, and Hughes's impressive sense of poetic and theatrical structure, it would have been difficult to imagine a more ideal team to construct 'a real Negro theatre.'"

Unfortunately, Hurston and Hughes had an argument that ended their collaboration before the play was finished. Neither the reasons for their argument, nor all the details about what happened next, have ever come to light. But at some point Hurston shared the play with friends and claimed that she was the sole author. Hughes became angry, and the incident ended the friendship between the two writers. They never collabo-

rated again, and the play was never produced during their lifetimes; in fact, it was first produced in 1991 at Lincoln Center Theater in New York.

Early Fiction

In 1933, Hurston published a story called "The Gilded Six-Bits" in *Story* magazine, about an African-American couple who work through a threat to their marriage but manage to rekindle the feelings of love and commitment that brought them together. Her story attracted the attention of Bertram Lippincott, one of the top publishers of the day. He contacted Hurston and asked if she had any fiction ready for publication. As it happened, she had had an idea for a novel in her head for a long time. She wrote *Jonah's Gourd Vine* over the next three months, and Lippincott published it in 1934. In a letter to a friend, she had written that she wanted to "show a Negro preacher who is neither funny nor an imitation puritan ramrod in his pants. Just the human being and poet he must be to succeed in a Negro pulpit." In fact, *Jonah's Gourd Vine* is loosely based on her parents. In it, she tells the story of John Pearson, a black preacher like her father, who destroys himself through violence and guilt. Hurston received a check for $200 as an advance payment for her novel on the same day that she was kicked out of her apartment for not having enough money to pay her rent.

> *"Sometimes I feel discriminated against, but it does not make me angry. How can any deny themselves the pleasure of my company?"*

In addition to "The Gilded Six-Bits," Hurston continued to publish short stories throughout her career, often on the themes of love, betrayal, and death. Her stories used folklore and allegory to show the conflicts experienced by African-Americans. She was considered a master of the form, according to Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Sieglinde Lemke, the editors of *The Complete Stories*, a recent collection of her short stories. "Her command of narrative voice and plotting, her concern with the themes of divine and human justice, her delight in the Southern black vernacular voice as a vehicle for narration, and the use of complex dynamics among a small group of characters set in her native Eatonville as the site for the unfolding of these themes—all of these elements that would assume such magnificent full-blown form in her first two novels *[Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *Their Eyes Are Watching God]* are present in these early short nar-

ratives. Clearly, Hurston used these stories, perhaps unconsciously, the way an artist uses a sketch for a larger work of art. What strikes the contemporary reader is that Hurston was deeply passionate about the people whose dreams and desires, whose traumas and foibles she describes with such elan, and that she loved the fictional language in which she cloaks their tales."

Mules and Men and Other Folklore

In 1935, Hurston published *Mules and Men*, a book containing the folklore she had collected during her college project and her other travels, primarily in Florida and Louisiana. It contains 75 folktales, several hoodoo rituals, a glossary of folk speech, and an appendix of folk songs, conjure formulas, and root prescriptions. Hurston is herself a character in the books, as she tells about the process of collecting the stories and then follows that up with the tales themselves. In richly elaborate language, she seamlessly weaves the folktales into her narrative. The book is considered historically important as the first book about African-American folklore to be collected by a black person and produced by a major publisher for a general reading audience.

Mules and Men was quite successful, but it met with criticism from some of her fellow black writers. At that time, most well-known black writers focused their work on the ways that African-Americans were mistreated and discriminated against in society. They used their writing as a tool to protest against racism. In contrast, many felt that Hurston's collection of folktales presented life in black communities in the South as too peaceful and pleasant. That view, according to her critics, reinforced an ugly stereotype about blacks being simple-minded, happy people who were satisfied with their lot in life. For example, in a 1936 article, reviewer Sterling Brown criticized the book for failing to discuss the exploitation and terrorism of southern black life. He charged that the characters in *Mules and Men* appeared carefree and easygoing in a land "shadowed by squalor, poverty, disease, violence, enforced ignorance, and exploitation." Similar criticism of Hurston and her work has continued to surface ever since.

Hurston, though, had a different view. She admired the people she had grown up with and expressed that admiration in her work. She celebrated the parts of black culture that were unique and valuable. She chose not to write about the often difficult interactions between blacks and whites. "I am not tragically colored. There is no great sorrow dammed up in my soul, nor lurking behind my eyes. I do not mind at all. I do not belong to the sobbing school of Negrohood who hold that nature has given them a

lowdown dirty deal and whose feelings are all hurt about it," she explained. "Sometimes I feel discriminated against, but it does not make me angry. How can any deny themselves the pleasure of my company?"

In 1936 and again in 1938, Hurston was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship, a prestigious financial award given to scholars, scientists, and artists to advance their work. She used this award to travel to the Caribbean islands of Jamaica and Haiti to study West Indian culture. She investigated the voodoo religion, which had evolved from the traditions and beliefs that the black residents had brought with them from Africa many generations earlier. She even met someone who was said to be a zombie, a person who had come back to life after dying. Hurston eventually turned her adventures into a book of folklore, *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica* (1938), an anecdotal study of the ceremonies and customs of those island nations.

Their Eyes Were Watching God

During the mid-1930s, Hurston focused on her work as a writer and anthropologist in order to take her mind off of a failed romantic relationship. She had fallen in love with a man, but was forced to leave him because he could not accept the importance of her career. "He begged me to give up my career, marry him, and live outside New York City," she later wrote. "I really wanted to do anything he wanted me to do, but that one thing I could not do."

Hurston ended up writing her best-known work, the novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, as a way to help deal with her feelings of loss. Published in 1937, the book tells the story of Janie Crawford and her struggles to learn about herself, life, and love. She marries three very different men in the book, including a handsome younger man named Tea Cake Woods. Tea Cake dies tragically, but the love they shared helps Janie grow and gain wisdom. While on its surface *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is a love story, on a deeper level its theme is Janie's search for identity and meaning.

Response to the book was mixed. Some African-Americans, particularly men, felt that Hurston's work denigrated her subjects because she didn't challenge the racial injustices of her era. For example, the writer Alain Locke, who was one of the principal voices of the Harlem Renaissance, wrote that her work ignored the serious issues of the day. Locke asked when Hurston would stop creating "these pseudo-primitives whom the reading public still loves to laugh with, weep over, and envy," and "come to grips with the motive fiction and social document fiction?" A more damaging criticism came from Richard Wright, the most influential African-American writer of the day. He said that *Their Eyes were Watching God* was like the minstrel shows, whose purpose was to let white people laugh at blacks. Hurston's novel "carries no theme, no message, no thought," he said. Instead, it just showed the parts of African-American life suitable for a white audience.

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> *"Reading* Their Eyes were Watching God *for perhaps the 11th time, I am still amazed that the language of the characters, that 'comical nigger dialect' that has been laughed at, denied, ignored, or 'improved' so that white folks and educated black folks can understand it, is simply beautiful. There is enough self-love in that one book — love of community, culture, traditions — to restore a world. Or create a new one." — Alice Walker*
>
> ——— " ———

Hurston's intent in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* — and her contemporaries' response to it — was recently summed up by Claudia Roth Pierpont in the *New Yorker* magazine. "She had written a love story . . . and become a counter-revolutionary," Pierpont wrote. "Against the tide of racial anger, she wrote about sex and talk and work and music and life's unpoisoned pleasures, suggesting that these things existed even for people of color, even in America; and she was judged superficial. By implication, merely feminine. In Wright's account, her novel contained 'no theme, no message, no thought.' By depicting a Southern small-town world in which blacks enjoyed their own rich cultural traditions and were able to assume responsibility for their own lives, Hurston appeared a blithely reassuring supporter of the status quo."

Hurston's use of language was at the heart of her critics' charges. At that time, black dialect was often used in minstrel shows and in movies as a way of belittling African-Americans as inferior and witless. Because of

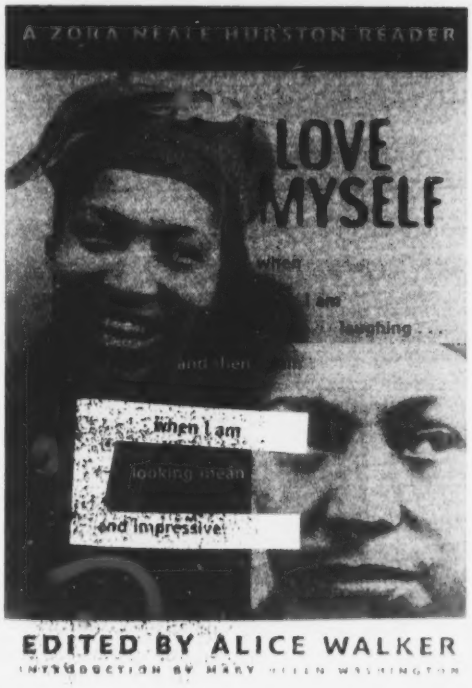
this, some critics strongly opposed her use of dialect. Yet for others, Hurston's use of language is her greatest artistic achievement. According to Pierpont, "[The] feat of rescuing the dignity of the speakers from decades of humiliation required a rare and potentially treacherous combination of gifts: a delicate ear and a generous sympathy, a hellbent humor and a determined imperviousness to shame. All this Hurston brought to *Their Eyes Were Watching God*—a book that, despite its slender, private grace, aspires to the force of a national epic, akin to works by Mark Twain, . . . offering a people their own language freshly caught on paper and raised to the heights of poetry." According to its admirers, this work brought to life her years of anthropological research and elevated folk culture to the realm of art. For this, many consider *Their Eyes Were Watching God* to be Hurston's greatest work and her legacy to literary history.

Dust Tracks on a Road

In 1942, Hurston published her autobiography, *Dust Tracks on a Road*. It gives an imaginative account of her rise from an impoverished childhood in the South to her role as one of the leading artists and intellectuals of the Harlem Renaissance, showing how she started life low yet climbed to the heights: "I have been in Sorrow's kitchen and licked out all the pots. Then I have stood on the peaky mountain wrapped in rainbows with a harp and a sword in my hands." This personal self-portrait, filled with Hurston's wit and spirit, gives a rare and poignant glimpse into her life.

Yet Robert Hemenway, who later published his own authoritative account of Hurston's life, called it "one of the most peculiar autobiographies in Afro-American literary history." In the book, Hurston changed, omitted, or exaggerated many aspects of her life. "As a result," Hemenway noted, "the book adds considerably to the mystery surrounding Zora Neale Hurston." As the poet Maya Angelou wrote, "The story she tells of her life could never have been told believably by a non-Black American, and the details in even her own hands and words offer enough confusions, contusions, and contradictions to confound the most sympathetic researcher." In effect, she created a legend of her own life, as richly imagined and as detailed as the folktales she worked so hard to preserve in her anthropological writings and in her fiction. Still, her story became very popular with readers. In celebration of the success of *Dust Tracks on a Road*, Hurston was profiled in a cover story in *Saturday Review* magazine, a rarity at that time for an African-American. For Hurston, that moment was the height of her fame during her lifetime.

Following the publication of *Dust Tracks on the Road*, Hurston returned to Florida, bought a houseboat, and traveled around by water for a few years.



In 1947, she visited the Central American nation of Honduras and decided to stay to work on what turned out to be her last novel. *Seraph on the Suwanee*, which was published the following year, featured no major African-American characters. Instead, it tells the story of Arvay Henson, a white Southern woman born into a poor family who struggles with issues of identity and self-worth. *Seraph on the Suwanee* is widely considered inferior to her earlier works.

In addition to working on her autobiography and a novel, Hurston was invited throughout this time to contribute essays to different magazines. Often, these commented on aspects of African-American culture. In many of these articles, she discussed cultural issues without getting involved in racial politics. A few, though, do showcase her sometimes contradictory views. For example, in "My Most Humiliating Jim Crow Experience" (1944), she described a miserable visit to a white doctor. But rather than voice her anger over being mistreated, she expressed pity for "the pathos of Anglo-Saxon civilization." In "Crazy for This Democracy" (1945), published shortly after the end of World War II, she cynically argued that certain ethnic groups are excluded from the democratic process in America. In "What White Publishers Won't Print" (1950), she discussed the use of stereotypes to keep African-Americans in their place and argued that publishers reject any writings that described African-Americans as fully assimilated into American society.

Struggling with Personal Problems

In 1948, Hurston's life was rocked by scandal. She was charged with molesting a ten-year-old boy who had been her neighbor. The charges were soon proved to be false and the case was officially dismissed, since Hurston had been in Honduras at the time the incident supposedly occurred. As it turned out, the child was emotionally disturbed. Hurston had recognized the problem and recommended that he receive psychiatric help. But the boy's mother disagreed with her opinion and resented her for expressing it. She charged Hurston with child molestation as a way of getting back at her. Unfortunately, even though the charges were false,

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they received a great deal of attention in the media. In fact, the story became front-page news in black newspapers across the country. The incident did permanent damage to Hurston's reputation.

Hurston retreated from public view over the next few years. She settled down in a small cottage in Eau Gallie, Florida. She worked on another novel, but found it difficult to write. Money was tight, and she wrote articles for magazines, did some teaching, and even worked as a maid in order to get by. In 1959, Hurston suffered a stroke. Unable to work and in need of constant medical care, she moved into a welfare home in Ft. Pierce, Florida. She lived there until she died of a heart attack on January 28, 1960. A few friends and relatives managed to scrape together enough money for a funeral, but they could not afford to buy a marker for her grave. So Hurston—who had been the best-known black woman writer in America a few years earlier—was buried in an unmarked grave. Few people remembered her in her last years, and she died alone and poor. Nevertheless, she seemed to have no regrets about her life. "I feel that I have lived," she once said. "I have touched the four corners of the horizon, for from hard searching it seems to me that tears and laughter, love and hate, make up the sum of life."

> *"In the end it is Hurston's pride and joy in being black—expressed at a time when being black was shameful—that speaks to readers of every race."*
> — Rosemary L. Bray, *New York Times*

Hurston's Work Is Rediscovered

For many years, Hurston was forgotten by much of the literary world. Her work was out of print, and she was unknown and unread. But recently, she was rediscovered as an important influence for a new generation of African-American writers, particularly women. Her work became an underground phenomenon in the early 1970s, with the advent of the black power and the feminist movements and the creation of black studies and women's studies departments at many universities. Soon, students and teachers began passing around tattered and xeroxed copies of her work. One person she inspired was Alice Walker, who became famous for her novel *The Color Purple*, as well as poems, essays, and other novels. In 1973, Walker traveled to Florida, spoke with people who had known Hurston, and purchased a marker for the author's grave. She then wrote an article

about the experience in 1975 for *Ms.* magazine. Walker called Hurston our prime symbol of "racial health—a sense of black people as complete, complex, *undiminished* human beings, a sense that is lacking in so much black writing and literature."

Walker's article for *Ms.* started a huge outpouring of appreciation for Hurston's life and work that continues to this day. A biography by Robert Hemenway appeared in 1977, and her novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* was reissued the following year. In 1979, Walker edited a compilation called *I Love Myself When I Am Laughing . . . and Then Again When I Am Looking Mean and Impressive: A Zora Neale Hurston Reader*, which included selections from her works as well as Walker's essay for *Ms.* Numerous important critical studies of Hurston's work followed, and she began to be seen as an important voice for African-Americans, for women, and for all Americans. In 1981, students and faculty at Morgan State University (formerly Morgan Academy) formed a Zora Neale Hurston Society. A few years later, her hometown of Eatonville began holding an annual Zora Neale Hurston Festival of the Arts that now attracts about 25,000 people each year. In 1990, a play based on Hurston's life called *Zora Neale Hurston: A Theatrical Biography* opened in New York City. That same year, another version of her life story called *Zora Is My Name!* was featured in an American Playhouse TV production on PBS. In 1995, Hurston became the first black woman to have all of her writings collected and published by the Library of America. In addition, TV personality Oprah Winfrey has expressed interest in turning *Their Eyes Were Watching God* into a movie.

Today, many people are aware of Hurston's important position in African-American literature and culture. "In the end it is Hurston's pride and joy in being black—expressed at a time when being black was shameful—that speaks to readers of every race," Rosemary L. Bray wrote in the *New York Times*. "Long before the word entered the language, Zora Neale Hurston was an Afrocentric writer. African culture and its influence in the New World were, for her, the pearls of great price that blacks risked losing in their quest for white acceptance and assimilation. In all her work, there remains the deeply felt conviction that there is something inimitably precious in every variation of the African-American voice."

Hurston's Legacy

Since the rediscovery of Hurston's work, many critics and writers have tried to define her legacy. Here, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. offers his view. "Rereading Hurston, I am always struck by the density of intimate experiences she cloaked in richly elaborated imagery. It is this concern for the

figurative capacity of black language, for what a character in *Mules and Men* calls 'a hidden meaning, jus' like de Bible . . . de inside meanin' of words,' that unites Hurston's anthropological studies with her fiction. For the folklore Hurston collected so meticulously as Franz Boas's student at Barnard became metaphors, allegories, and performances in her novels, the traditional recurring canonical metaphors of black culture. Always more of a novelist than a social scientist, even Hurston's academic collections center on the quality of imagination that makes these lives whole and splendid. But it is in the novel that Hurston's use of the black idiom realizes its fullest effect. . . . [Though virtually ignored later], Hurston's ideas about language and craft undergird many of the most successful contributions to Afro-American literature that followed."

Alice Walker called Hurston our prime symbol of "racial health—a sense of black people as complete, complex, **undiminished** *human beings, a sense that is lacking in so much black writing and literature."*

Alice Walker offered these comments on her response to Hurston's work. "In reading through the 30-odd-year span of her writing, most of us, I imagine, find her alternately winning and appalling, but rarely dull, which is worth a lot. We love Zora Neale Hurston for her work, first, and then again (as she and all Eatonville would say), we love her for herself. For the humor and courage with which she encountered a life she infrequently designed, for her absolute disinterest in becoming either white or bourgeois, and for her devoted appreciation of her own culture, which is an inspiration to us all."

"Reading *Their Eyes were Watching God* for perhaps the 11th time," Walker continues, "I am still amazed that the language of the characters, that 'comical nigger dialect' that has been laughed at, denied, ignored, or 'improved' so that white folks and educated black folks can understand it, is simply beautiful. There is enough self-love in that one book—love of community, culture, traditions—to restore a world. Or create a new one."

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

Hurston was married two times, but neither marriage lasted more than a few years. While she was taking classes at Howard University, she met a young medical student named Howard Sheen. They were married on May 19, 1927, while she was on an anthropology research trip to Florida.

They separated after less than a year, however, and were divorced in 1931. She married a much younger man named Albert Price III on June 27, 1939. They began having problems within a short time and were divorced in 1943. Hurston never had any children.

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Fiction

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Moses, Man of the Mountain, 1939
Seraph on the Suwanee, 1948
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The Gilded Six-Bits, 1986
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Plays

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The First One: A Play, 1927
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Fast and Furious, 1931 (with Clinton Fletcher and Tim Moore)

Other

Mules and Men, 1935 (folklore collection)
Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica, 1938 (folklore collection)
Dust Tracks on a Road, 1942 (autobiography)
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http://falcon.jmu.edu/~ramseyil/hurston.htm

RETROSPECTIVE

Shirley Jackson 1916-1965

American Novelist and Short Story Writer
Author of "The Lottery," *The Haunting of Hill House,* and *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*

BIRTH

Shirley Jackson was born on December 14, 1916, in San Francisco, California. Her parents were Leslie H. Jackson, a business executive, and Geraldine (Bugbee) Jackson, a homemaker. She had one younger brother, Barry.

YOUTH

Jackson grew up in the San Francisco suburb of Burlingame. Known as a tomboy, she was a bright and active child whose interests ranged from sports to music. For example, she enjoyed playing hockey with neighborhood boys, but she also liked to play the piano and write poetry. In her early teens she also began to keep a diary that became very important to her. Years later, Jackson stated that her poetry and diary became "a way of making daily life into a wonderfully unusual thing instead of a grind."

> *"I can't persuade myself that writing is honest work. It is a very personal reaction, but 50 per cent of my life is spent washing and dressing the children, cooking, washing dishes and clothes, and mending. After I get it all to bed, I turn around to my typewriter and try to—well, to create concrete things again. It's great fun, and I love it. But it doesn't tie any shoes."*

Spirited and curious, Jackson preferred to spend her childhood days reading about the world or playing sports with other children. As she grew older, however, her mother became very unhappy with her daughter's "unladylike" pursuits. She was a woman who placed great value on social standing and personal reputation, and Shirley's roughhousing and plain appearance embarrassed her. As time passed, Geraldine Jackson worked hard to interest her daughter in frilly clothes, tea parties, and other activities that young girls of that time period traditionally pursued. Shirley resisted, however, and began to behave and dress in ways that made her feel independent. By the time Jackson was a teenager, her mother had grown very angry and resentful of Shirley's refusal to wear feminine clothing and make-up as well as her growing weight problem. Their relationship became so bad that at one point, Geraldine Jackson cruelly told her daughter that she had unsuccessfully tried to have her aborted.

As Shirley's relationship with her mother crumbled, she retreated to the world of literature. She continued to write poetry and maintain her diary, and she developed a lifelong interest in witchcraft and other subjects of the supernatural. As she began to collect books on witchcraft and voodoo and her knowledge of those subjects grew, she became very superstitious. By 1932, for example, she referred to many of her days as lucky or un-

lucky, and a few years later she called February "a month of evil omen and disillusion." It was around this time that Jackson also became convinced that she could hear ghostly conversations and music that were inaudible to anyone else.

EDUCATION

Jackson attended elementary school in Burlingame. She was a good student who enjoyed her studies, even though she was sometimes too casual about doing her homework. Jackson spent her freshman year of high school in Burlingame, but in 1933 her father received a promotion at work and the entire family moved across the country to Rochester, New York.

The next few years were painful ones for Jackson. She attended Brighton High School in Rochester, where she often felt like an outcast. Few boys expressed interest in her because of her plain appearance, and at one point she was denied entrance into a high school sorority for being overweight and wearing the wrong kind of clothes. These rejections, along with her mother's continued criticism, made her life very difficult.

Jackson graduated from high school in the spring of 1934. She enrolled in the University of Rochester in September 1934, but as the months passed she suffered periods of deep depression and unhappiness, especially because she was so lonely. In 1936 she withdrew from the university and returned home, where she devoted most of her free time to writing poetry and short stories. It was during this period that Jackson established the disciplined writing habits that she maintained for the rest of her life.

In the fall of 1937 Jackson enrolled at Syracuse University in upstate New York, where she quickly became one of the college's most visible students. In addition to her course work in journalism and English, she helped found a controversial campus magazine called *Spectre* in 1939. This publication included short stories and poetry written by Jackson and other students, but it also featured essays and editorials that harshly criticized faculty members and called for increased civil rights for blacks and Jews. As new issues of the magazine were published, Jackson became romantically involved with Stanley Edgar Hyman, a student activist who also worked on the *Spectre* staff and who would later become a social activist, editor, and literary critic.

Jackson graduated from Syracuse with a bachelor's degree in English in the spring of 1940. Her relationship with Hyman continued after graduation, even though both sets of parents objected to their romance. Jackson's parents worried that Hyman's influence would push their

daughter even farther away from mainstream American society, while Hyman's parents wanted their son to marry someone who shared his Jewish background. Hyman and Jackson defied their parents by moving to New York and getting married on June 3, 1940.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

In the 1940s, Jackson began publishing the fiction for which she is acclaimed today. She wrote humorous semi-autobiographical tales about family life as well as eerie and gruesome short stories and novels, but always with a keen ear for telling a story. Above all, Jackson is acclaimed today for her chilling short story "The Lottery." "Shirley Jackson wrote in two styles," according to her obituary in the *New York Times*. "She could describe the delights and turmoil of ordinary domestic life with detached hilarity; and she could, with cryptic symbolism, write a tenebrous horror story in the Gothic mold in which abnormal behavior seemed perilously ordinary. In either genre she wrote with remarkable tautness and economy of style, and her choice of words and phrases was unerring in building a story's mood."

Becoming a Writer

Jackson's life became very busy during the early 1940s. While her husband worked as an editor with major New York magazines like the *New Republic* and the *New Yorker*, Jackson divided her time between clerical jobs and fiction writing. By 1942, when she gave birth to the first of their four children, several of her short stories had been published.

During the mid-1940s Jackson's reputation as a talented short story writer continued to grow. Her story "Come Dance with Me in Ireland," first published in the *New Yorker*, was chosen for inclusion in *Best American Short Stories, 1944*. Several other stories written by Jackson attracted considerable attention as well. But in 1945 Hyman accepted a faculty position at Bennington College in Vermont. The entire family relocated to the small village of North Bennington, where they got a cool reception. The community's wary response to the arrival of Jackson and her family has been attributed to many different factors, from a general distrust of outsiders to anti-Semitic (anti-Jewish) feelings toward Hyman.

The late 1940s proved to be a hectic but productive period in Jackson's life. By the end of the decade, she had given birth to four children who required a great deal of attention and care. Yet even as she tended to the needs of her growing family—usually without any assistance from her

husband—Jackson managed to find time to continue her fiction writing. In fact, she published new short stories in a number of major magazines during this time, including *Harper's* and *Mademoiselle*. But even though these stories added to her reputation as one of America's most promising writers, Jackson did not become famous until the publication of her short story "The Lottery."

"The Lottery"

"The Lottery" is one of the most famous short stories in the history of American literature. In the story, the townspeople of an unnamed village gather together in the town square on a warm summer day in order to hold a mysterious lottery. At first, the atmosphere in the town square seems friendly and relaxed. As the ceremony begins, however, a feeling of tension and dread settles over the crowd. This feeling builds until Mrs. Hutchinson, a wife and mother who has apparently been a longtime member of the community, draws a black slip that designates her as the lottery "winner." The other townspeople subsequently gather up rocks and grimly stone her to death, even as she cries out that the results were not fair.

As Jackson later recounted, the effortless process of writing "The Lottery" certainly didn't give her any indication of the furor that was to come. Jackson wrote her most famous work quickly and easily, as she recalls here. "The idea had come while I was pushing my daughter uphill in her stroller. . . . I put the idea fairly clearly in my mind when I put my daughter in her playpen and the frozen vegetables in the refrigerator, and writing the story, I found that it went quickly and easily, moving from beginning to end without pause. As a matter of fact, when I read it over later I decided that except for one or two minor corrections, it needed no changes and the story I finally typed up and sent to my agent the next day was almost word for word the original draft."

When her husband, Stanley Edgar Hyman, read it, he was excited right away. "Shirley has written a story that just astounds me," he told a friend, the poet Ben Belitt. "She's written a real masterpiece, and I don't know

where it came from." His friend Belitt had this to say: "It was the pure thing. She could be funny, she could be readable—but this came from somewhere else. I could see the wonderment in Stanley—here he had stumbled in his own household on the real, right, immortal thing. It was incandescent, the mythic thing you find in Greek literature. With 'The Lottery,' she had made it. She did something unkillable, irreversible." But not everyone agreed. Jackson's agent didn't really like the story, but still agreed to sell it. And the editor of the *New Yorker* wasn't happy with the piece, but decided to publish it anyway.

"I tell myself stories all day long. I have managed to weave a fairy tale of infinite complexity around the inanimate objects in my house, so much so that no one in my family is surprised to find me putting the waffle iron away on a different shelf because in my story it has quarreled with the toaster. . . . It looks kind of crazy, of course. But it does take the edge off cold reality. And sometimes it turns into real stories."

Response to "The Lottery"

"The Lottery" was published in the *New Yorker* on June 28, 1948. It immediately became the most controversial story ever to appear there, provoking an outburst of fury, horror, disgust, and fascination. Hundreds of letters poured in to the magazine's offices from people who had read the story. Some letters expressed horror at the story's awful ending, while others demanded an explanation of the story's message. "This story was incendiary; readers acted as if a bomb had blown up in their faces, as indeed in a sense it had. Shirley stuck a nerve in mid-20th century America the way few writers have ever succeeded in doing, at any time. She had told people a painful truth about themselves—and the people were fighting mad," Judy Oppenheimer wrote in the *New York Times Book Review*. "There were three main themes which dominated the letters of the first summer," Jackson later recalled. "Bewilderment, speculation, and plain old-fashioned abuse." The whole public reaction to the story came as a surprise to Jackson. "One of the most terrifying aspects of publishing stories and books is the realization that they are going to be read, and read by strangers. I had never fully realized this before. . . . It had simply never occurred to me that these millions and millions of people would sit down and write me letters I was downright scared to open. . . . Even my mother scolded me."

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In North Bennington, meanwhile, the publication of "The Lottery" made Jackson very unpopular with some members of the close-knit community. Many townspeople recognized the similarities between their village and the little town described in Jackson's story, and they were convinced that her story cast them in a very bad light.

In the weeks and months following the publication of "The Lottery," Jackson refused to talk much about it. She admitted that she had written the entire tale in just a few hours, but did not supply much information about the story's message or meaning. She wanted readers to decide for themselves what it meant. Years later, however, she stated that in writing the story, "I suppose I hoped, by setting a particularly brutal rite in the present and in my own village, to shock the readers with a graphic dramatization of the pointless violence and general inhumanity of their own lives."

After the publication of "The Lottery," Shirley Jackson remained best known as a short story writer. In 1949, 25 of her short stories were published in an acclaimed collection called *The Lottery, or, the Adventures of James Harris*. The collection included "The Lottery" and two dozen other stories written by Jackson and published in the *New Yorker* over the previous few years. Other notable stories included "A Pillar of Salt," in which a woman becomes confused and panic stricken during a visit to the city, and "The Summer People," in which a small community becomes hateful toward an old couple who linger too long at their summer cottage. The publication of *The Lottery* collection cemented Jackson's reputation as a writer who was fascinated with exploring the darker aspects of human nature.

Early Novels

But in addition to writing short stories, Jackson was also working as a novelist during this time. She published her first novel, *The Road Through the Wall*, in 1948. It's a dark, spooky tale of a seemingly normal and quiet suburban California community that is shattered by a series of disturbing events. In 1949, she published *Hangsaman*, the story of a shy teenage girl who resorts to fantasy to cope with life's challenges. In 1954 she produced a novel called *The Bird's Nest* that was highly acclaimed when published and that is still enjoyed by readers today. Jackson did a lot of research on schizophrenia for *The Bird's Nest*, basing the story on a case history about a real woman. The novel shows a woman trying to reconcile the multiple personalities she has because of childhood trauma. "Miss Jackson's gift is not to create a world of fantasy and terror, but rather to discover the

grotesque in the ordinary world," said Elizabeth Janeway in the *New York Times Book Review*. "The grotesque is so powerful here just because it takes off from every day life and constantly returns there until we feel that everyday has a little Halloween in it."

Chronicles of Happy Family Life

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, Jackson's writings often focused on troubled people struggling to survive in an often uncaring world. But in 1954 she published an autobiographical memoir that was far different in tone. *Life Among the Savages* was a humorous and affectionate account of life with her rambunctious family. It included warm accounts of all aspects of her family's life, from hilarious dinner table conversations to Christmastime encounters with department store Santas. Years later, *New York Times* contributor Elizabeth Frank called *Life Among the Savages* "a mid-50s celebration of marriage and family, as sunny and warm as her novels were sinister and dark." Three years later, Jackson published *Raising Demons*, another lighthearted account of life in the Jackson household.

Around this time, Jackson expressed great satisfaction with her life, even though she admitted that her many household duties sometimes made it hard for her to find time to write. "I can't persuade myself that writing is honest work," she said. "It is a very personal reaction, but 50 per cent of my life is spent washing and dressing the children, cooking, washing dishes and clothes, and mending. After I get it all to bed, I turn around to my typewriter and try to—well, to create concrete things again. It's great fun, and I love it. But it doesn't tie any shoes." Still, she indicated that she managed to handle even the most mundane chores in ways that encouraged her creativity. "I tell myself stories all day long," she once said. "I have managed to weave a fairy tale of infinite complexity around the inanimate objects in my house, so much so that no one in my family is surprised to find me putting the waffle iron away on a different shelf because in my story it has quarreled with the toaster. . . . It looks kind of

crazy, of course. But it does take the edge off cold reality. And sometimes it turns into real stories."

The Dark Side of Jackson's Life

Jackson's family memoirs painted a picture of a happy mother with four delightfully unpredictable children and a supportive husband. In reality, however, these books did not always provide an accurate description of her life. In fact, the 1950s were a very difficult time for the author and her family. Jackson loved her children deeply, and she made many sacrifices for their welfare. But Jackson and her husband maintained a hard-partying lifestyle throughout much of this period, hosting countless parties for visiting writers, critics, educators, and professors. She became a heavy smoker and drinker during this time, and many reports suggest that she became addicted to amphetamines (a chemical stimulant) and tranquilizers.

Jackson's relationship with Hyman also gave her great pain at times. Hyman supported his wife's literary efforts throughout his life, and they enjoyed many long evenings of conversation about literature and other subjects. But he repeatedly had affairs with his female students, and he refused to help her care for their children or do household chores. In addition, he apparently took perverse pleasure in encouraging his wife to eat large amounts of food, even though he knew that her weight had been a source of unhappiness to her throughout her life. "[Hyman] would encourage her to eat, urge food on her," recalled Jackson's literary agent. "Thick cream pies. She was very fat, maybe 250 pounds. I had to watch him stuffing her like a goose."

As the 1950s progressed, Jackson maintained a busy writing schedule, even though she suffered growing problems with depression, anxiety attacks, and physical ailments like arthritis and bronchitis. Her deteriorating condition had a pronounced effect on the quality of care she gave her children. She sometimes raged at the children over minor incidents, and she neglected to take care of basic housekeeping and childcare tasks. "There were actually years when I didn't brush my teeth, and Shirley didn't notice," recalled one child. The interior of the house eventually became such a maze of unwashed dishes, dirty clothes, and stray cats that concerned neighbors sometimes cleaned up and bathed the children themselves. Jackson's poor relationship with the rest of the North Bennington community did not help matters, either. "Even as her star was rising in the outside world," wrote Judy Oppenheimer, "she was becoming more and more a pariah in her own village, where her isolation

and sense of rejection made her, for a time, a prisoner in her own house, a victim of agoraphobia," which is an abnormal fear of open spaces. Oppenheimer is the author of a *New York Times Book Review* article about Jackson, as well as a comprehensive biography of her life

Jackson's feelings of depression and unhappiness also may have been aggravated by continued contact with her critical mother. For example, when *Time* published a picture of Jackson in 1962, her mother wrote: "Why oh why do you allow the magazines to print such awful pictures of you? . . . If you don't care what you look like or care about your appearance why don't you do something about it for your children's sake and your husband's?" When Jackson read this painful letter, she shot off an angry response: "Will you try to realize that I am grown up and fully capable of managing my affairs? I have a happy and productive life, I have many good friends, I have considerable stature in my profession, and if I decide to make any changes in my manner of living, it will not be because you have nagged me into it. . . . I have a right to live as I please, and I have just had enough of the unending comments on my appearance and my faults."

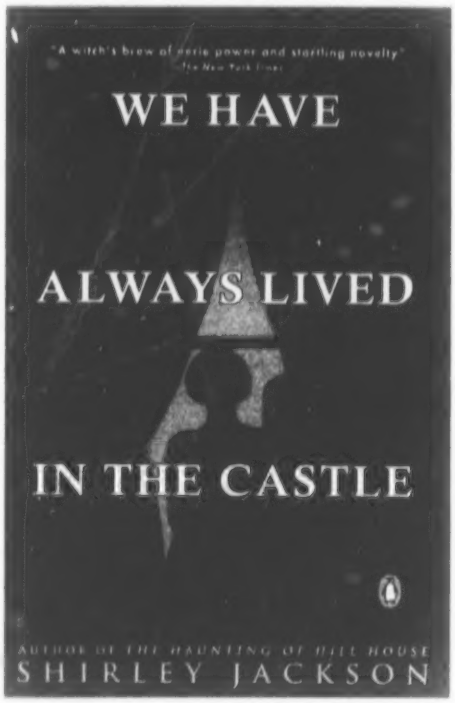
The Haunting of Hill House and Other Late Novels

All of Jackson's early novels contained elements of the strange or supernatural. But beginning with the 1958 novel *The Sundial,* she became even more preoccupied with these themes. In *The Sundial,* the author describes the interactions of a group of people who have gathered at a desolate estate in order to await the end of the world. A year later, Jackson published *The Haunting of Hill House,* perhaps her best known novel. In *The Haunting of Hill House,* four people enter an old estate known as Hill House in order to investigate rumors that it is haunted. They soon discover that the rumors are true, as the old building displays an evil intelligence. "[In *Haunting],* Shirley Jackson for the first time gives the devil his due," wrote critic Mary Kittredge in *Discovering Modern Horror Fiction.* "The potential for disaster is fully explored; the evil force is developed into

a completely independent and alien entity, and is shown to be a power that can triumph."

The Haunting of Hill House was widely praised when it was released, and it continues to be regarded as one of Jackson's finest works. Novelist Stephen King, in fact, called it one of the greatest horror novels of all time. The *Haunting of Hill House* has also been adapted for the movies on two occasions. In 1963 actress Julie Harris starred in *The Haunting*, which was released to good reviews. In 1999 a new movie adaptation of the book, also called *The Haunting*, was released. This version, which starred Liam Neeson and Catherine Zeta-Jones, received mixed reviews from critics and movie audiences.

Jackson's last novel was *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, which many critics consider to be her finest work after "The Lottery." In this unsettling story about family, murder, and greed, a 12-year-old girl poisons most of her selfish family at the dinner table. She then spends the next several years living in the family home with her sister and uncle, united against the townspeople who distrust and fear them. This novel of human weakness and evil also received strong reviews. *New Leader* reviewer Geoffrey Wolff, for example, called the novel "the darkest, most sinister novel I have ever read." And critic John Parks said, "The real horror of the novel comes not so much from the unpunished murders by a 12-year-old child, but largely from the inexplicable madness and violence of the so-called normal and ordinary people outside the Blackwood home."



Jackson's Death

In the early 1960s Jackson suffered a major nervous breakdown. Disabled by terrible attacks of anxiety and depression, she was unable to leave her house for months at a time. As one of her daughters said in an interview with Oppenheimer, "She felt bad that the books weren't enough therapy, that writing a book every year or two didn't keep her sane." By 1964 Jackson had recovered somewhat from her breakdown, but she continued to struggle with a variety of physical problems.

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On August 8, 1965, she died in her sleep from a heart attack in her North Bennington home.

After Jackson's death, Stanley Edgar Hyman paid tribute to his wife's talent. "Shirley Jackson wrote in a variety of forms and styles because she was, like everyone else, a complex human being, confronting the world in many different roles and moods. . . . For all her popularity, she won surprisingly little recognition. She received no awards or prizes, grants or fellowships. She saw those honors go to inferior writers—or to writers who were no writers—without bitterness, but with the wry amusement which was her habitual attitude toward her own life and career. . . . I think that the future will find her powerful visions of suffering and inhumanity increasingly significant and meaningful, and that Shirley Jackson's work is among that small body of literature produced in our time that seems apt to survive. That thought, too, she would have found wryly amusing."

"The fact is that this woman, who would take her children out on the porch when a lightning storm hit and howl back at the thunder, wrote two novels and one short story that are classics of the horror genre, works that can bear comparison with the best of [Edgar Allan] Poe. She was a true storyteller, with a rich and haunted imagination."
— Elizabeth Frank, New York Times

Jackson's Legacy

In the three decades since Jackson's death, several of her literary works have endured as classics of American horror fiction. "The Lottery" remains one of the best-known American short stories of the 20th century, and both *The Haunting of Hill House* and *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* are regarded as the works of an amazingly talented writer. As *New York Times* critic Elizabeth Frank wrote, "The fact is that this woman, who would take her children out on the porch when a lightning storm hit and howl back at the thunder, wrote two novels and one short story that are classics of the horror genre, works that can bear comparison with the best of [Edgar Allan] Poe. She was a true storyteller, with a rich and haunted imagination."

HOBBIES AND OTHER INTERESTS

Jackson's interests included playing the piano and reading about witchcraft and other supernatural subjects. In fact, by the time of her death, she had collected more than 500 books on witchcraft.

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

Jackson married Stanley Edgar Hyman on June 3, 1940. They had four children—Laurence Jackson, Joanne Leslie, Sarah Geraldine, and Barry Edgar.

SELECTED WRITINGS

Novels

The Road Through the Wall, 1948 (reprinted as *The Other Side of the Street,* 1956)
Hangsaman, 1949
The Bird's Nest, 1954 (reprinted as *Lizzie,* 1957)
The Sundial, 1958
The Haunting of Hill House, 1959
We Have Always Lived in the Castle, 1962

Collections

"The Lottery," published in the *New Yorker,* June 28, 1948
The Lottery, or, the Adventures of James Harris, 1949
The Magic of Shirley Jackson, 1966 (edited by Stanley Edgar Hyman)
Come Along with Me, 1968 (edited by Stanley Edgar Hyman)
Just an Ordinary Day, 1996

Autobiography

Life Among the Savages, 1954
Raising Demons, 1957

Juvenile

The Witchcraft of Salem Village, 1956
Nine Magic Wishes, 1963
Famous Sally, 1966

HONORS AND AWARDS

Edgar Allan Poe Award: 1961, 1965

FURTHER READING

Books

Authors and Artists for Young Adults, Vol. 9, 1992
Bakerman, Jane S., ed.. *And Then There Were Nine . . . More Women of Mystery,* 1985
Contemporary Authors, New Revision Series, Vol. 52, 1996
Discovering Modern Horror Fiction, 1985
Friedman, Lenemaja. *Shirley Jackson,* 1975
Hall, Joan Wylie. *Shirley Jackson: A Study of the Short Fiction,* 1993
Jackson, Shirley, *Life Among the Savages,* 1954
Jackson, Shirley. *Raising Demons,* 1957
Oppenheimer, Judy. *Private Demons: The Life of Shirley Jackson,* 1988
Who Was Who in America, 1961-1968, 1968

Periodicals

Boston Globe, July 17, 1988, p.90
Chicago Tribune, Dec. 26, 1996, p.3 (Tempo section)
Nation, Dec. 23, 1996, p.25
New York Times, Aug. 10, 1965, p.27; July 3, 1988, p.G1; July 7, 1988, p.C21; Aug. 7, 1988, p.G6
New York Times Book Review, June 26, 1949, p.15; Dec. 29, 1996, p.10
Newsweek, Aug. 22, 1988, p.66
People, Feb. 17, 1997, p.38
Publishers Weekly, Oct. 14, 1996, p.63
San Francisco Chronicle, July 24, 1988, p.1 (Review section)
Saturday Evening Post, Dec. 18, 1965, p.63
Vogue, July 1988, p.70
Wilson Library Bulletin, Dec. 1963, p.352

Angela Johnson 1961-

American Writer of Novels, Stories, and Poetry for Children and Young Adults
Author of the Award-Winning Novels *Toning the Sweep* and *Heaven*

BIRTH

Angela Johnson was born on June 18, 1961, in Tuskegee, Alabama. Her parents were Arthur Johnson, an auto worker, and Truzetta (Hall) Johnson, an accountant.

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"Family storytelling has been the overriding influence in my writing. . . . My childhood was enriched by stories of people, most unknown to me, but usually related. There is such a rich storytelling tradition in the African-American culture. It's art, dance, and music all rolled into one. I am lucky to be part of this proud tradition."

YOUTH

Johnson grew up in the small town of Shorter, Alabama, as part of a close-knit black family that placed a high value on family history and storytelling. In fact, her grandfather, Arthur Johnson Sr., was a local radio broadcaster who often entertained his listening audience with a rich variety of stories. "Family storytelling has been the overriding influence in my writing," she stated. "While my book characters aren't actual living beings, they are part of wholes—my family, living and dead. My childhood was enriched by stories of people, most unknown to me, but usually related. There is such a rich storytelling tradition in the African-American culture. It's art, dance, and music all rolled into one. I am lucky to be part of this proud tradition."

Apparently, Johnson's interest in telling stories of her own began at an early age. "When I was a baby, my parents say that I would lie in my crib, awake through the entire night and tell myself stories," Johnson recalled. "They'd hear whispers in the middle of the night for years to come, as this was a habit I'd keep through my childhood. When my brothers were finally born I had more of an audience. I didn't have to whisper my stories anymore."

Johnson also traces her early interest in storytelling to a diary she received from her mother when she was about eight years old. As she filled up the diary pages with her childhood experiences and dreams, she realized that writing was an activity that she really enjoyed. "I thought, 'This is fantastic, writing down thoughts that nobody can see.' That did it for me."

When Johnson was a teenager, she and her family moved to the small town of Windham, Ohio. She confesses that she rarely read any books that challenged or stimulated her during those early teen years. "I read Archie comic books," she admitted. "I wouldn't say that I was this precocious reader, not at all. After school, junior high, late elementary—after school it was go to the drug store, get two Snickers bars and an Archie

comic book. That was twice a week. And I can't truly remember reading anything. The only thing I might have read a little bit of in junior high was Judy Blume. You know, *Are You There, God? It's Me, Margaret.* All that adolescent angst. The only thing I was interested in as far as picture books was Ezra Jack Keats because I actually got to see some small black faces, and that was it. I didn't get into reading until much later."

EDUCATION

Once she reached high school, however, Johnson met an English teacher who was a "beatnik." She credits this unconventional teacher for developing her interest in reading serious literature and poetry. "I started reading beatnik poetry when I was in high school," she recalled. "I loved the rhythm."

As Johnson progressed through high school, her interest in literature and poetry continued to grow. But in looking back on those years, she admits that there were some gaps in the kinds of literature to which she was exposed. "Even though we had a wonderful English department, I wasn't offered the books I now know exist," she noted. "I'd never heard of Zora Neale Hurston or [James] Baldwin," two famous African-American writers. Johnson also remembers that when she finally read *Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush,* a young adult book written by the African-American writer Virginia Hamilton, "I cried through three-quarters of the book. . . . I thought, 'Where have you been? Where has this stuff been? I've been missing it!'" [For further information on these authors, see the entry on Hurston in this volume of *Biography Today Authors;* see the entry on Baldwin in *Biography Today Authors,* Vol. 2; and see the entry on Hamilton in *Biography Today Authors,* Vol. 1.]

Johnson also continued to develop her own writing during her teen years, turning to poetry in an effort to express her feelings. "I grew up in a house where politics were debated," she explained. "So, I was confronted early on with the realities of life—poverty, hungry people, teenage pregnancy. I tried to run off one time

When she was young, Johnson says, "I read Archie comic books. I wouldn't say that I was this precocious reader, not at all. After school, junior high, late elementary—after school it was go to the drug store, get two Snickers bars and an Archie comic book. That was twice a week."

to save the baby seals, to spray them so they wouldn't be killed for their pelts. But a friend's mom busted me before I could go. I got angry early, and that's when I started to write the poetry." For Johnson, as she explains here, writing poetry was a way to express the anger she was feeling.

Johnson graduated from Windham High School in 1979. She then enrolled at Kent State University in Kent, Ohio. From 1979 to 1981 she pursued a degree in education, thinking that she would make teaching her career. In 1981, however, she left Kent State to become a writer. "I had been a nanny for almost the entire time I was in school," she recalled. "I loved to write, I loved the children and was always telling them stories. It seemed like a natural sort of start."

"I grew up in a house where politics were debated. So, I was confronted early on with the realities of life—poverty, hungry people, teenage pregnancy. I tried to run off one time to save the baby seals, to spray them so they wouldn't be killed for their pelts. But a friend's mom busted me before I could go. I got angry early, and that's when I started to write the poetry."

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

Since she devoted herself to writing, Johnson has published books for many age groups and interests. She has written board books and picture books for young readers that present loving portraits of African-American families. She has also written novels, stories, and poetry for older children. Many use first-person narration to give voice to unique African-American characters. In all her books, though, Johnson writes about situations and feelings that are common to all cultures, creating stories that are universal in their appeal. "[In high school] my writing was personal and angry," she later recalled. "I didn't want anyone to like it. I didn't want to be in the school literary magazine, or to be praised for something that I didn't really want understood. Of course, ten years later, I hope that my writing is universal and speaks to everyone who reads it."

Becoming a Writer

After leaving college in 1981, Johnson spent two years as a child development worker with a nonprofit organization called Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA). Through the mid-1980s, she took a variety of other jobs

to support herself. But throughout this period she continued to work on her writing, and in the spring of 1987 she completed her first book.

This book, which she titled *Tell Me a Story, Mama,* was a story intended for children. It described a warm storytelling session between a young girl and her mother. "[It was] written for all the times I'd begged my father for stories he'd told a thousand times," Johnson stated. "Childhood stories were the best. I could listen to them over and over. The child in *Tell Me a Story, Mama* can listen over and over, too. It's reassuring to children to know the stories won't change."

Johnson's tale, illustrated by artist David Soman, was published in 1989. It immediately received positive reviews from book critics. *School Library Journal* reviewer Christine Behrmann, for example, described *Tell Me a Story, Mama* as a "touching picture book. Both language and art are full of subtle wit and rich emotion." *Kirkus Reviews* agreed, calling the story an "outstanding debut" and "a wonderful book for sharing."

The success of *Tell Me a Story, Mama* enabled Johnson to leave other jobs behind and devote herself to writing full-time. "I consider myself a full-time writer," she said. "You know, no other jobs. I'm home every day. Even if I'm not writing, I'm thinking about writing. So that's how I relieve a lot of the guilt about not writing."

Writing for Younger Children

During the early 1990s Johnson established herself as a talented writer of picture books for young children. In these stories, Johnson celebrates African-American families while at the same time exploring topics like aging, love, and sibling relationships that appeal to children from all ethnic backgrounds. In *Do Like Kyla* (1990), Johnson describes a young African-American girl who admires her older sister so much that she imitates her all day long. Another story, *When I Am Old with You* (1990), describes a young African-American boy who dreams about growing old

with his grandfather. In 1991, Johnson published *One of Three,* a story about a girl who describes the benefits and drawbacks of being the youngest of three sisters.

While Johnson also started writing young adult fiction in the mid-1990s, she has continued to write books for young audiences as well. In 1993, for example, she wrote *Julius,* a wild and funny children's tale about a girl, Maya, and the misbehaving pet pig that her grandfather brings her from Alaska. Other recent illustrated children's books written by Johnson include *Shoes Like Miss Alice's* (1995), which describes the bond that grows between a young girl and her new babysitter; *The Aunt in Our House* (1996), which shows how a young brother and sister feel when their aunt, Daddy's sister, comes to stay; *The Rolling Store* (1997), in which an African-American youngster tells her white friend about her grandfather's old rural community; and *The Wedding* (1999), in which young Daisy, the flower girl, describes the joyous and bittersweet feelings about her older sister's wedding. In 1999 she also published *Maniac Monkeys on Magnolia Street,* a chapter book for slightly older kids, those in upper elementary school. In a series of interconnected stories, it tells about 10-year-old Charlie (Charlene) as she gets to know her new neighborhood on Magnolia Street. Johnson has said that she plans to write another book about Charlie's adventures on Magnolia Street.

"[My books] are not just for black children. Black children will have a better life if white children are reading these books too."

Toning the Sweep

By 1993, Johnson had already published several books for young children. But that year, she published her first book for young adults, *Toning the Sweep.* It tells the story of a trip undertaken by 14-year-old Emily and her mother to visit Emily's dying grandmother, who lives in the California desert. Once they arrive at their destination, Emily learns about her family's past and gains a greater appreciation for her mother. Using different perspectives and different narrative voices, Johnson created a nuanced and accomplished piece of storytelling that contains many messages about family and friendship. Johnson herself called *Toning the Sweep* "a valentine to the California desert. It is about coming of age and change. It's also about forgiveness, which is something I'm constantly working on myself. I try to work through these feelings in the story."

When *Toning the Sweep* was published, it was greeted with widespread acclaim in the world of young adult publishing. Critics were generous with their praise, like this commentator for *Kirkus Reviews*. "Johnson's spare beautiful first novel—a thematic expansion of *Tell Me a Story, Mama*—portrays a crucial turning point for African-American women from three generations. . . . Johnson leaves much to understatement, trusting readers to delve between the lines. . . . At the close, the laughter shared by these three and their friends seems to linger in the dry, still air. Place this brave and wonderful piece of storytelling with the best." A reviewer for *Booklist* was equally impressed. "A celebratory dance of life, reflecting the end of childhood and the beginning of womanhood and selfhood, the story is about African-American history, the pain of it . . . as well as the joy. . . . With ingenuity and grace, Johnson captures the innocent, the vulnerability, and the love of human interaction, as well as the melancholy, the self-discovery, and the introspection of adolescence." Johnson's novel won several awards, including the prestigious Coretta Scott King Award. This award is presented annually by the American Library Association to African-American authors and illustrators who write books for children "that demonstrate sensitivity to the value of all people."

Writings for Older Children

While Johnson continued to write for young children after the publication of *Toning the Sweep*, she became even better known as a writer of novels, short stories, and poetry for pre-teens and teenagers. She has published several books for this age group in the 1990s. In 1995, she published the novel *Humming Whispers*, a sensitive story about Sophy, a young dancer, and her relationship with her older sister, Nicole. Nicole suffers from schizophrenia, a type of mental illness in which people suffer changes in their personality and sometimes lose contact with reality. Now, at 14, Sophy is worried that she will become mentally ill, too. Three years later, in

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1998, Johnson published several books for teens and pre-teens. One was the novel *Songs of Faith* (1998), which tells the story of 13-year-old Doreen, who lives in a small town in Ohio in 1975. Doreen is learning to deal with some difficult changes in her life, including her parents' divorce and the absence of her father, whom she desperately misses. A *Booklist* reviewer described the novel this way: "With a tart tongue and heart-wrenching lyricism, Doreen narrates this story, watching as her adored younger brother expresses, in a variety of ways, how distraught he is. . . . Another tender and eloquent book from a gifted writer."

Johnson also published a short story collection, *Gone from Home: Short Takes*, that same year. Each of these stories is written in first-person narration in the voice of a young main character and explores the idea of home. In these 12 stories, according to a review in *Publishers Weekly*, "Johnson zeroes in on the idealism and resiliency that make young people a powerful force in the world. Despite their rough circumstances, these characters have a keen and refreshing sense of justice that helps them recognize—and perform—compassionate acts. . . . Johnson's flavorful language will draw readers immediately into the brief, emotion-packed dramas."

In addition, Johnson also published in 1998 the highly acclaimed *The Other Side: Shorter Poems*, a collection of verse about her childhood memories of Shorter, Alabama. The 14-year-old narrator is summoned back to Shorter by her grandmother, who calls her home: "They're pulling Shorter down / Come see your past before it's all dust, baby." The poems depict the violence and racism of the South, but also reminisce about family and community. A review in *School Library Journal* commented that the poems included in the book "take readers into Johnson's world, as she provides glimpses of her years growing up in the small town of Shorter, Alabama. Through prose poetry and colloquial speech, she recalls skinny-dipping, the soft Alabama breeze, dirt roads, and red dusty porches." *The Other Side: Shorter Poems* was honored as a runner up for the 1999 Coretta Scott King award—second only to another Johnson book, *Heaven*.

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Heaven

Johnson's most critically acclaimed young adult book of this period, however, was *Heaven*. This 1998 novel tells the story of 14-year-old Marley. She lives in the town of Heaven, with her loving African-American family, near her good friends, and as part of a strong community. Then she discovers that she is adopted, and she struggles to come to terms with the news that the mother and father who raised her are not her birth parents. What's soon clear, though, is that everyone in the novel has secrets and problems, including two off Marley's best friends, a young unmarried father and an unhappy girl from a wealthy family. As in earlier works, Johnson examines the themes of what makes a place a home and what makes people family. In lyrical and poetic language, Johnson writes powerfully about deception, self-discovery, and finding happiness despite sorrow.

Johnson received her second Coretta Scott King Award for *Heaven*. She was delighted to receive this prestigious honor again but made it clear that she did not view herself as exclusively a writer for African-American kids. "[My books] are not just for black children," she said. "Black children will have a better life if white children are reading these books too."

Johnson's Thoughts on Writing

Johnson notes that authors have many different ways of working, and that each writer has to find the method that works best for him or her. "When I write, it's usually just a feeling that overcomes me," she stated. "I'm very influenced by my surroundings." She admits that unlike many other novelists, she doesn't use outlines to plot the development of her stories.

Johnson believes that she will always be most interested in writing stories about young adults and children. "I think I'll always be writing from the point of view of how I felt at 14," she remarked. "It's such a great time. You're so creative, but I don't think you could live through that [period of your life] two times. When I was growing up, the big problem was drugs.

Now there are guns in the schools. And that's not something I ever had to worry about."

Johnson also believes that it is important for her to continue telling stories that provide positive messages for families of all kinds. "Everyone wants family stories to read to their children," she wrote in *Horn Book*. "And aren't we lucky that there are so many different kinds of families in books so that the children in these families know that there is a place for them: blended families, racially mixed families, families with gay parents, adopted children, single-parent families, and of course the nuclear family. Though not everyone wants to acknowledge the varied family lifestyles of some, I say celebrate. Celebrate the differences and make children aware of families not like their own. . . . Understanding and tolerance of others' lifestyles is the first step toward a loving and empathetic adult who'll understand that family are the people who surround and love you no matter who they or you are."

"Though not everyone wants to acknowledge the varied family lifestyles of some, I say celebrate. Celebrate the differences and make children aware of families not like their own. . . . Understanding and tolerance of others' lifestyles is the first step toward a loving and empathetic adult who'll understand that family are the people who surround and love you no matter who they or you are."

ADVICE FOR YOUNG WRITERS

Johnson believes that children who are interested in writing should be encouraged to experiment with stories and poetry without being made to feel that they are committing themselves to a career choice. "Never let anybody tell you that you have to make a living [as a writer]," she counsels children. "If [a child] wants to write, you should say, 'That's fine. Do that.' . . . If he wants to write, you have to tell him, 'There's nothing stopping you.'" She indicates that once young people gain some experience as writers, they will be able to make more informed decisions about whether they want to pursue a career as a novelist or journalist. Johnson also contends that children who are encouraged to write at an early age are more likely to pursue poetry or literature as a hobby in their later years, even if they enter totally different professions.

HOBBIES AND OTHER INTERESTS

Johnson loves watching old movies and listening to jazz and reggae music. She also enjoys traveling to exotic locales like the Caribbean and desert regions.

HOME AND FAMILY

Johnson lives in Ohio and remains close to her family. She is single and has no children.

WRITINGS

Young Adult Books

Toning the Sweep, 1993
Humming Whispers, 1995
Songs of Faith, 1998
Gone from Home: Short Takes, 1998 (short stories)
The Other Side: Shorter Poems, 1998 (poetry)
Heaven, 1998

Children's Books

Tell Me a Story, Mama, 1989
Do Like Kyla, 1990
When I Am Old with You, 1990
One of Three, 1991
The Leaving Morning, 1992
The Girl Who Wore Snakes, 1993
Julius, 1993
Joshua by the Sea, 1994
Joshua's Night Whispers, 1994
Mama Bird, Baby Birds, 1994
Rain Feet, 1994
Shoes Like Miss Alice's, 1995
The Aunt in Our House, 1996
The Rolling Store, 1997
Daddy Calls Me Man, 1997
Maniac Monkeys on Magnolia Street, 1999
The Wedding, 1999

HONORS AND AWARDS

Best Books of the Year (*School Library Journal*): 1989, for *Tell Me a Story, Mama*; 1994, for *Toning the Sweep*
Ezra Jack Keats New Writer Award (U.S. Board on Books for Young People): 1991
Editor's Choice Award (*Booklist*): 1994, for *Toning the Sweep*
Coretta Scott King Award (American Library Association): 1994, for *Toning the Sweep*; 1999, for *Heaven*

FURTHER READING

Books

Black Authors & Illustrators of Children's Books, 1992
Seventh Book of Junior Authors & Illustrators, 1996
Twentieth-Century Children's Writers, 1995

Periodicals

Akron Beacon Journal, Feb. 16, 1989, p.D1
Booklist, Apr. 1, 1993, p.1432; Mar. 15, 1995, p.1334
Horn Book Magazine, Sep./Oct. 1992, p.620; Sep./Oct. 1993, p.603; Mar./Apr. 1997, p.179
Miami Herald, Feb. 5, 1999, p.E1
Publishers Weekly, Aug. 22, 1994, p.54
Quarterly Black Review of Books, Apr. 30, 1995, p.40
Scholastic Scope, Dec. 14, 1998, p.15
School Library Journal, Apr. 1993, p.140; Apr. 1995, p.154; Oct. 1998, p.136

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Jon Krakauer 1954-

American Journalist, Non-Fiction Writer, and Mountaineer
Best-Selling Author of *Into the Wild* and *Into Thin Air*

BIRTH

Jon Krakauer (pronounced krack-OUR) was born in 1954 in Brookline, Massachusetts, and grew up in Corvallis, Oregon. His parents were Lewis Krakauer, a physician, and Carol Krakauer, an art teacher. Jon was the third of five children. He has three sisters—Karin, Wendy, and Sarah—and one brother, Andrew.

YOUTH

High Expectations

"I was a fairly ordinary kid growing up in Corvallis," recalled Krakauer. "My father was a sensible, rigid parent who constantly badgered his five children to study calculus and Latin, keep their noses to the grindstone, fix their sights early and unflinchingly on careers in medicine or law."

> *"Before I'd even enrolled in kindergarten, [my father] began preparing me for a shining career [in medicine or law]. For Christmas and birthdays I received such gifts as a microscope, a chemistry set, and the* Encyclopedia Britannica. . . .

Krakauer remembers, however, that his father's desire to see his children succeed actually put enormous pressure on him and his brother and sisters. "Before I'd even enrolled in kindergarten, he began preparing me for a shining career [in medicine or law]," he said. "For Christmas and birthdays I received such gifts as a microscope, a chemistry set, and the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. From elementary school through high school, my siblings and I were hectored to excel in every class, to win medals in science fairs, to be chosen princess of the prom, to win election to student government. Thereby and only thereby, we learned, could we expect to gain admission to the right college, which in turn would get us into Harvard Medical School; life's one sure path to meaningful success and lasting happiness."

Early Love of Climbing

Krakauer worked and studied hard to please his father. As a youngster, however, he became interested in mountain climbing, an activity that eventually produced great tension between them. "It was my father, a weekend mountaineer, who taught me to climb," recalled Krakauer. "He bought me my first rope and ice ax when I was eight years old and led me into the Cascade Range to make an assault on the South Sister, a gentle10,000-foot volcano not far from our Oregon home. It never occurred to him that I would one day try to shape my life around climbing."

Thrilled by his experiences on the South Sister, young Krakauer became fascinated with the sport of mountain climbing. He spent hours reading about famous mountaineers and fantasizing about reaching the top of the world's greatest mountains. Before long, the sport of climbing had become an obsessive interest to Krakauer. "While my friends idolized [as-

tronaut] John Glenn, [pitcher] Sandy Koufax, and [quarterback] Johnny Unitas, my own heroes were [Tom] Hornbein and [Willi] Unsoeld," he stated. Hornbein and Unsoeld were mountaineers who in 1963 became the first people ever to reach the summit of Mount Everest, the world's highest mountain, by climbing the peak's difficult West Ridge.

As Krakauer got older, his fascination with climbing continued to grow. At the same time, however, his relationship with his father began to sour. "As a youth, I am told, I was willful, self-absorbed, intermittently reckless, moody," he admitted. "I was not a clone of my father. During my teens, as I came to this realization, I veered gradually from the plotted course [of a career in medicine or law], and then sharply. My insurrection prompted a great deal of yelling. The windows of our home rattled with the thunder of ultimatums. By the time I left Corvallis . . . to enroll in a distant college . . . I was speaking to my father with a clenched jaw or not at all. When I graduated four years later and did not enter Harvard or any other medical school but became a carpenter and climbing bum instead, the unbridgeable gulf between us widened."

Years later, Krakauer looked back on his stormy relationship with his father with a more mature perspective. "I came to understand that I had baffled and infuriated my father at least as much as he had baffled and infuriated me," he said. "I saw that I had been selfish and unbending and a giant pain in the ass. He'd built a bridge of privilege for me, a hand-paved trestle to the good life, and I repaid him by chopping it down."

EDUCATION

Krakauer attended elementary school in the public schools in Corvallis, and in 1972 he graduated from Corvallis High School. He continued his education at Hampshire College in western Massachusetts. But even as Krakauer worked toward earning his degree at Hampshire, he found it diffi-

> *". . . . From elementary school through high school, my siblings and I were hectored to excel in every class, to win medals in science fairs, to be chosen princess of the prom, to win election to student government. Thereby and only thereby, we learned, could we expect to gain admission to the right college, which in turn would get us into Harvard Medical School; life's one sure path to meaningful success and lasting happiness."*

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cult to concentrate on his studies. Mountain climbing had become the most important thing in his life. Krakauer graduated from Hampshire College with a bachelor's degree in December 1975.

CHOOSING A CAREER

Obsessed with Climbing

In the mid-1970s, during college and afterward, Krakauer escaped to the mountains whenever he could. In 1974, for example, he and a small group of climbers made a month-long trip to the Arrigetch Peaks, a group of towering granite mountains in northern Alaska. They spent weeks clambering up and down the rugged walls of the Arrigetch, becoming the first climbers ever to reach the top of a couple of the peaks. Years later, Krakauer described the feeling of being the first person ever to reach the top of one of the mountain summits: "Far below, the spires and slabs of the surrounding peaks glowed orange, as if lit from within, in the eerie, nightlong dusk of the arctic summer. A bitter wind screamed across the tundra from the Beaufort Sea, turning my hands to wood. I was as happy as I'd ever been in my life."

Krakauer described the feeling of being the first person ever to reach the top of one of the mountain summits in the Arrigetch Peaks in northern Alaska: "Far below, the spires and slabs of the surrounding peaks glowed orange, as if lit from within, in the eerie, nightlong dusk of the arctic summer. A bitter wind screamed across the tundra from the Beaufort Sea, turning my hands to wood. I was as happy as I'd ever been in my life."

Experiences such as the one in the Arrigetch Peaks increased Krakauer's obsession with climbing and mountaineering. "By the time I was in my early 20s climbing had become the focus of my existence to the exclusion of almost everything else," he admitted. He loved the challenge of tackling a difficult climbing route, the exhilaration that he felt when he was clinging to the side of a mountain, and the feeling of belonging that came with being a part of the close-knit climbing community. "In those years I lived to climb, existing on five or six thousand dollars a year, working as a carpenter and a commercial salmon fisherman just long enough to fund the next trip to the Bugaboos or Tetons or Alaska Range," he said.

By the late 1970s Krakauer had developed into a brilliant rock and ice climber with first ascents of mountains and rocks throughout North America. (A "first ascent" is when a climber or team of climbers successfully reaches the top of a mountain by a route that has never before been used.) His travels had taken him all around the world, from the windswept mountains of northern Alaska to treacherous mountain ranges in South America. As time passed, however, he began to think more about the dangerous situations in which he had placed himself during the previous few years. He also started to feel envious of other people his age who had started families and bought nice homes for themselves.

Around 1980 Krakauer decided to quit climbing. That same year, he married Linda Moore. As a former climber herself, Moore knew how dangerous mountain climbing could be. In fact, she agreed to marry Krakauer only after he promised to retire from climbing. As it turned out, however, Krakauer's retirement from climbing lasted only a year or so. When he resumed his participation in that dangerous sport, his marriage nearly fell apart. Gradually, however, Moore accepted her husband's passion for climbing.

Becoming a Writer

Krakauer's life also changed in other ways around this period. In the early 1980s, he earned most of his money as a carpenter. But he also developed a side career as a freelance writer, producing articles for climbing-oriented journals and other small magazines. With each passing month, he devoted more of his time and energy to his writing. "In 1981 I sold my first story to a national magazine," he recalled. "In November 1983, I bought a word processor, took off my tool belt for what I hoped would be the last time, and began writing for a living. I've been at it full-time ever since."

By the mid-1980s Krakauer had established himself as a talented writer. He contributed articles about mountaineering, natural history, architec-

"It is natural in any sport to seek ever-greater challenges. What is to be made of a sport in which to do so also means taking ever-greater risks? Should a civilized society continue to condone, much less celebrate, an activity in which there appears to be a growing acceptance of death as a likely outcome?"

ture, and foreign cultures to a variety of national magazines, including *Outside, Rolling Stone, Smithsonian,* and *Architectural Digest.* As Jeff Baker wrote in the *Oregonian,* "Krakauer expanded to other subjects and turned into a writer who climbed, rather than a climber who did other jobs until the next mountain beckoned."

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

Eiger Dreams

In 1990 Krakauer's first book was published. *Eiger Dreams: Ventures Among Men and Mountains* was a collection of essays that he had written over the previous decade for *Outside, Smithsonian,* and other magazines. "Eiger" is the name of a famous peak in Switzerland. All of the essays included in *Eiger Dreams,* in fact, related to climbing or mountain exploration in one way or another, and several examined the great rewards and terrible risks associated with climbing. "It is natural in any sport to seek ever-greater challenges," Krakauer wrote in an essay entitled "A Bad Summer on K2." "What is to be made of a sport in which to do so also means taking ever-greater risks? Should a civilized society continue to condone, much less celebrate, an activity in which there appears to be a growing acceptance of death as a likely outcome?"

But while Krakauer's essays were based on the sport of mountaineering, the author still managed to cover a wonderful array of subjects, from the history of Alaskan bush piloting, which celebrated the pilots who fly small planes deep into wilderness areas, to the claustrophic feeling of being stuck inside a tent because of bad weather. His ability to write entertainingly about issues of interest to a wide range of readers made the collection a surprise success. *Eiger Dreams* was highly praised by climbing magazines, and even received some complimentary attention from national magazines and newspapers. *New York Times Book Review* critic Tim Cahill, for instance, wrote that "Krakauer has taken the literature of mountains onto a higher ledge. His snow-capped peaks set against limitless blue skies present problems that inspire irrefutable human experiences: fear and triumph, damnation and salvation." *Kirkus Reviews* added that *Eiger Dreams* was "likely to please not only the mountain maniacs but adven-

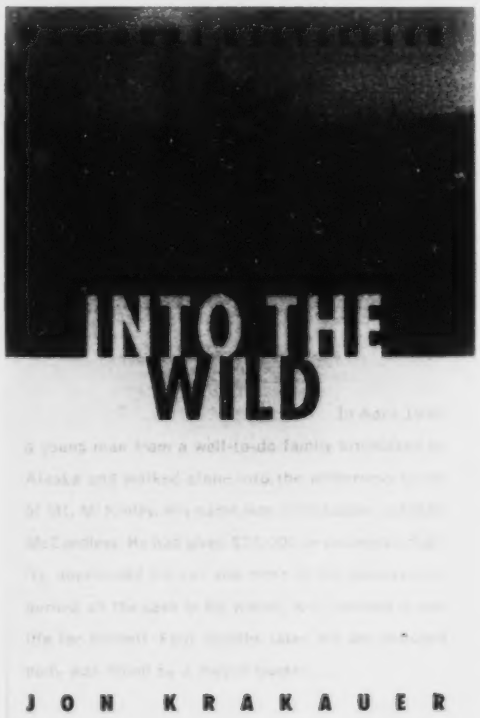
tures buffs in general." By the early 1990s, the success of *Eiger Dreams* and his continued work with leading outdoor magazines had made Krakauer one of the leading journalists in the field of travel and adventure writing.

Into the Wild

In 1992 *Outside* magazine approached Krakauer with a new assignment. They wanted him to write an article about Christopher McCandless. A bright and idealistic 23-year-old, McCandless had hiked into the Alaskan wilderness earlier that year in order to live off the land and get closer to nature. But the young man ran into trouble and ended up starving to death.

Krakauer's account of McCandless's disappearance and death, called "Death of an Innocent," appeared in the January 1993 issue of *Outside*. As soon as the issue appeared on newsstands, the magazine received a huge response from readers. In fact, the article triggered a greater volume of reader mail than any other piece in the magazine's history up to that time. "Some readers admired the boy immensely for his courage and noble ideals," recalled Krakauer. "Others fulminated that he was a reckless idiot, a wacko, a narcissist who perished out of arrogance and stupidity—and was undeserving of the considerable media attention he received."

The controversy over Krakauer's article faded eventually. But Krakauer's fascination with McCandless's life and death remained strong. He later admitted that he was "haunted by . . . the boy's starvation and by vague, unsettling parallels between events in his life and those in my own." After all, in Krakauer's younger days, he had behaved much as McCandless did. Both men had abandoned material wealth and comfort in their early 20s in order to find meaning for their lives in America's wilderness.



As Krakauer pondered the parallels between his own life and that of McCandless, he thought a great deal about a mountain climbing

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trek that he had made back in 1977. That year, he had solo climbed a deadly and treacherous peak known as Devil's Thumb along the Alaska-British Columbia border. "The fact that I survived my Alaska adventure and McCandless did not survive his was largely a matter of chance," Krakauer wrote. "Had I not returned from the Stikine Ice Cap in 1977, people would have been quick to say of me—as they now say of him—that I had a death wish." In reality, though, Krakauer believes that he was basically an adventurous and wilderness-loving young man who "didn't yet appreciate [death's] terrible finality or the havoc it could wreak on those who'd entrusted the deceased with their hearts. . . . In my case—and I believe, in the case of Chris McCandless—that was a very different thing from wanting to die."

——— " ———

"[Everest is] like outer space. Your surroundings are quite barren, harsh and austere. The thick down clothes you wear make you as clumsy as you'd be in a space suit. Also, you're breathing oxygen from cylinders for life support."

——— " ———

Krakauer's continued fascination with McCandless's life and beliefs finally spurred him to write an entire book about the young man. Using McCandless's own diary entries and many interviews with friends and family members, he put together an engrossing account of the young adventurer and his last, tragic days. The final result, called *Into the Wild,* was published in 1996 to widespread critical acclaim. "[As Krakauer] picks through the adventures and sorrows of Chris McCandless's brief life, the story becomes painfully moving," wrote Thomas McNamee in the *New York Times Book Review.* "[His] life and his death may have been meaningless, absurd, even reprehensible, but by the end of *Into the Wild,* you care for him deeply." Christopher Lehmann-Haupt offered similar praise in the *New York Times.* "Mr. Krakauer has taken the tale of a kook who went into the woods and made of it a heart-rending drama of human yearning."

As *Into the Wild* became a best-seller, Krakauer realized that his account of McCandless's life held great meaning for many readers. "I can't tell you how many people have written to me or come up to me and said I had a brother like [McCandless] or I always wanted to do something like that or I felt that way when I was young," Krakauer said. "[His story] touched a nerve, I guess, because it's in the American tradition of Huck Finn lighting out for the territory."

Climbing Mount Everest

In the spring of 1996, Krakauer began work on an another assignment for *Outside*. The magazine's editors wanted to examine the tremendous popularity of guided expeditions to the summit of Mount Everest, the tallest mountain in the world. On these guided expeditions, clients pay expert mountaineers as much as $65,000 a person to guide them to the top of Everest, which is located on the border of Nepal and Tibet. Publisher Larry Burke explained that "our fear, and Krakauer's, was that as the number of customers and guiding firms has multiplied, the mountain has become a dangerous circus, overrun with too many people climbing under the illusion that success is virtually guaranteed and that if things do go wrong, well, there's always that great big safety net, the guides."

Krakauer happily accepted the offer, even though his climbing background was on technically difficult mountains rather than high-altitude peaks. He knew that Mount Everest had claimed the lives of 135 climbers through 1995, and that its upper reaches featured brutal cold, oxygen-light atmosphere, and vicious storms. But climbing Everest had been a childhood dream, and Krakauer knew that he had far more experience than many other clients on the mountain. His enthusiasm for the upcoming adventure increased even more when *Outside* arranged for him to join an expedition led by Rob Hall, one of the most highly respected mountaineering guides in the world.

Hall's expedition group included two other guides and eight clients, including Krakauer. The journalist did not like being a client. He was accustomed to climbing independently and in partnership with others, not as someone who always had to obey the instructions of the guides. "I bristled at being a client the whole trip," he recalled. "I'm a climber, not a client. I don't like anyone making life-or-death decisions for me. . . . The reason you climb is that it's all about personal responsibility and making decisions." Krakauer recognized, however, that Hall and the other guides needed to insist on obedience from all clients in order to lessen the risk of injury or death.

Throughout April 1996, Krakauer and the other members of Hall's group slowly made their way up the slopes of the mighty mountain. They stayed at established camps along the way, so that they could gradually get used to the higher altitude. All members of the expedition knew that if they tried to climb the mountain too quickly, they might suffer from various forms of altitude sickness, some of which can cause death. But as Hall's team advanced up the mountain, Krakauer became increasingly alarmed by the large number of other expeditions in the area and the inexperience

of many of the climbers he encountered. He worried that the expeditions might get in the way of one another. He also became convinced that many of the climbers advancing up Everest's slopes did not belong on the mountain.

Disaster at the Top of the World

Early on the morning of May 10, 1996, Krakauer and the other members of Hall's expedition began their final ascent to the top of Everest. They were joined by several other climbing parties who wanted to take advantage of the relatively clear weather. As Krakauer and the other climbers plodded through the snow and sub-zero temperature, the upper mountain's harsh environment seemed to suck the energy out of them with each step forward. "It's like outer space," Krakauer later said. "Your sur-

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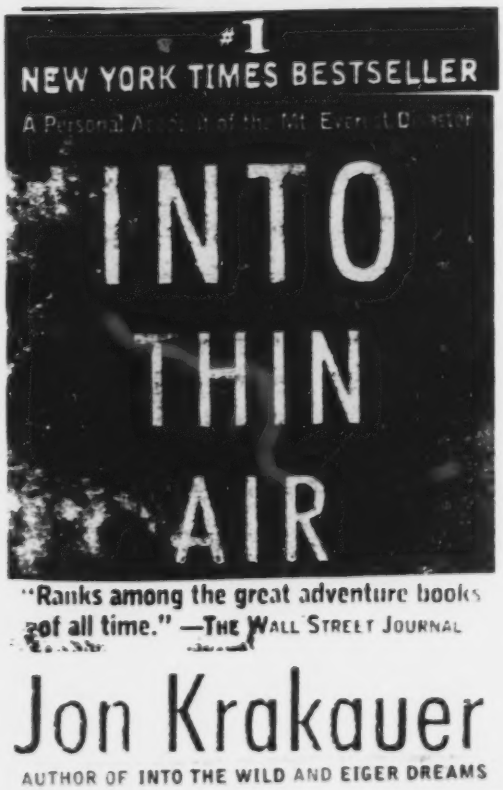
Into Thin Air

Krakauer's article recounting the Mount Everest tragedy first appeared in the September 1996 issue of *Outside.* His 17,000-word piece won a National Magazine Award and quickly became regarded as the most authoritative account of the incident. Still, some people criticized him for his report, which questioned the decisions of Hall, Fischer, and other climbers on the mountain. Krakauer, however, remained unapologetic. "I'm a working journalist, and I was there, and I was there to do a job—to tell what happened as best I could," he said. "I certainly feel bad that some people are hurt by my assessments, but somebody needed to step up and tell what went on up there. Jesus, people died—a lot of people died."

One year later, Krakauer published *Into Thin Air,* an entire book about the ill-fated climb and the storm on Everest. "I felt that [the article] was much too abbreviated to do justice to the tragedy," Krakauer said. "The Everest climb had rocked my life to its core, and it became desperately important for me to record the events in complete detail."

Some friends counseled Krakauer to wait a few years before writing the book. They thought that if he waited, he would be able to examine the tragedy more objectively. But Krakauer decided that he could not wait. "I hoped something would be gained by spilling my soul in the calamity's immediate aftermath, in the roil and torment of the moment," he wrote. "I wanted my account to have a raw, ruthless sort of honesty that seemed in danger of leaching away with the passage of time and the dissipation of anguish."



Into Thin Air: A Personal Account of the Mt. Everest Disaster became a runaway bestseller. It also received very good reviews from critics. Writing in the *New York Times Book Review,* Alastair Scott noted that Krakauer "has produced a narrative that is both meticulously researched and deftly constructed. . . . But perhaps Mr. Krakauer's greatest

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roundings are quite barren, harsh and austere. The thick down clothes you wear make you as clumsy as you'd be in a space suit. Also, you're breathing oxygen from cylinders for life support."

Around 1 p.m. on the afternoon of May 10, Krakauer finally reached the summit of Everest. But he was so weary that he "just couldn't summon the energy to care." He began his descent, even as other climbers from Hall's group and an expedition led by a guide named Scott Fischer pushed past him to reach the top. As Krakauer continued downward, however, a storm swept across the mountaintop, bringing 100-mile-an-hour winds and 70-below temperatures. Krakauer managed to stumble through the blizzard to the safety of an expedition camp. Many climbers in the Hall and Fischer groups, however, became caught in the storm. As the blinding blizzard worsened, errors in judgement, physical weariness, and bad luck combined to place the lives of the climbers in jeopardy. By the time the storm ended hours later, eight climbers had died, including guides Fischer and Hall.

As the full scale of the tragedy became apparent, Krakauer felt enormous grief and guilt. He had become friends with many of the climbers who had died. In addition, he held himself partly to blame for the death of guide Andy Harris. He had encountered Harris during the storm and felt that the guide seemed a little disoriented. But Krakauer left him behind to resume his descent. After all, he was mentally and physically exhausted, too, and never really considered that one of his guides might actually need help from him. "Had we been climbing together in a nonguided situation as equal partners, it's inconceivable to me that I would have neglected to recognize his plight," Krakauer wrote. "But on this expedition he had been cast in the role of invincible guide, there to look after me and the other clients; we had been specifically indoctrinated not to question our guides' judgement. The thought never entered my crippled mind that Andy might in fact be in terrible straits." When he later learned of Harris's death, he became overwhelmed with guilt. "When the chips were down and it was expedient to be a client, I was a client. People don't understand that. But it is a huge deal to me."

When Krakauer returned home to the United States, the tragedy on Everest continued to haunt him. "The plain truth is that I knew better but went to Everest anyway," he said. "And in doing so I was a party to the death of good people, which is something that is apt to remain on my conscience for a very long time. . . . I wish I had never gone. It was a stupid, stupid thing to do. A lot of people lost their lives because they had the same dream. Believe me, it's not worth it."

achievement is his evocation of the deadly storm, his ability to re-create its effects with a lucid and terrifying intimacy."

Krakauer believes that his experiences on Everest will continue to haunt him for the rest of his life. But the emotional wounds of the tragedy have healed somewhat with the passage of time. In 1997 he returned to the sport of climbing during a two-month visit to Antarctica. One year later, he traveled to the base of Everest to help build a memorial to the people who lost their lives on the mountain.

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

Krakauer married Linda Moore in 1980. They currently live in Boulder, Colorado. They have no children. Their marriage is a happy one, although Krakauer admits that his climbing activities caused some problems during the 1980s. "We went through a bunch of years where climbing was a big issue," he admitted in an interview with *Outside Online*. "Now it is less of an issue. It is how I make my living, to no small degree. . . . It's a huge part of whom I am, and I wouldn't be a writer if it wasn't for climbing and Linda understands that and she accepts it."

HOBBIES AND OTHER INTERESTS

In addition to travel and climbing, Krakauer enjoys reading and photography. The author has also been an active participant in various charitable causes. In 1996 he created a memorial fund that honors the five fallen climbers from Hall's expedition by providing aid to native peoples of the Himalayas. He has also been an active supporter of the American Himalayan Foundation, an organization devoted to helping Himalayan communities through the construction of schools and hospitals and the preservation of their culture and environment. Finally, Krakauer arranged to have all of his profits from sales of an expanded 1998 edition of *Into Thin Air* donated to charity.

WRITINGS

Eiger Dreams: Ventures Among Men and Mountains, 1990
Into the Wild, 1996
Into Thin Air: A Personal Account of the Mount Everest Disaster, 1997

In addition, Krakauer has contributed articles to many national magazines, including *Outside* and *Smithsonian*. He also served as photographer for *Iceland: Land of the Sagas* by David Roberts and *High Exposure: An Enduring Passion for Everest and Unforgiving Places* by David Breashears.

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HONORS AND AWARDS

American Alpine Club Literary Award
National Magazine Award: 1996, for "Into Thin Air," in *Outside*

FURTHER READING

Books

Authors and Artists for Young Adults, Vol. 24, 1998
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OBITUARY

Leo Lionni 1910-1999

Dutch-Born American Children's Book Writer and Illustrator
Author of Such Award-Winning Books as
Inch by Inch, Swimmy, Frederick, and *Alexander and the Wind-Up Mouse*

BIRTH

Leonard Lionni was born on May 5, 1910, in Watergraafsmeer, a suburb of Amsterdam, Holland. Holland is also called the Netherlands, and its people are called Dutch. He was the only child of Louis Lionni, a diamond cutter who later became an accountant, and Elisabeth Grossouw Lionni,

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an opera singer. Leo grew up speaking Dutch as a young boy, and he also learned to speak a bit of German when he was quite young.

YOUTH

For the first four years of his life, Lionni remained in Watergraafsmeer. His memories of this time were few and fleeting. "Yet I recognize the light and the time of day they share, the soft golden light of late afternoon, the varnished light of old paintings," he recalled. "The light that has coated all the memories of my childhood in Amsterdam." One regular monthly event was a visit to the big city to see his grandparents, the Grossouws. "I loved Oma's house," he noted, using the German word "Oma" for grandmother. "It was so light, spacious, and gay, and I could run around the living room, climbing on anything, and yell as loud as I wanted without ever being scolded."

A painting by Marc Chagall, which hung outside Lionni's bedroom door, inspired his first artistic efforts as a child. "It was a happy canvas with cheerful colors that seemed to flutter like ribbons in an icy wind. It was altogether another world, where anything could happen and everything was unexpected—a noisy, busy world, close by and touchable. Perhaps it was the secret birthplace of all the stories I ever wrote, painted, or imagined."

In the spring of 1915, Lionni and his parents moved to Amsterdam. They lived with his grandparents until they could find a house of their own. In early fall of that same year, Lionni's father became a certified public accountant and found the family a large apartment that could serve as both office and home. Lining the halls of this new home were the paintings that inspired Lionni's first artistic efforts. Most notable was a painting by Russian-born artist Marc Chagall that hung outside his bedroom door. "It was a happy canvas with cheerful colors that seemed to flutter like ribbons in an icy wind," Lionni related. "It was altogether another world, where anything could happen and everything was unexpected—a noisy, busy world, close by and touchable. Perhaps it was the secret birthplace of all the stories I ever wrote, painted, or imagined."

This painting, as well as many of the others in Lionni's home, came on loan from his father's uncle Willem, who collected works by modern

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painters of the time. Because Willem traveled so much, he left his paintings with various friends and family members. "The tastes of Lionni's family, its immersion in a multiplicity of art forms from music to architecture to painting and drawing, its enthusiasm for the daring and modern, all drew him early in his life into a natural, passionate relationship to art that defined him and his work forever after," wrote Giulianna Davidoff in the *Chicago Tribune*.

Lionni began his own artistic career when his Uncle Piet, an architect, gave him an art table for his ninth birthday and taught him drawing techniques. "No wonder that when I was asked what I wanted to be when I grew up, the answer was always, without hesitation, 'An artist.' For me Art was a generous word that included painting, sculpture, singing, piano playing, and now architecture," Lionni noted. Like most young children, though, Lionni had other interests outside of art. He loved animals, for example, and many of the things he studied and collected ended up in an aquarium in his bedroom. "It was my zoo, my botany laboratory," he recalled. "For there, with the miraculous consent of my otherwise fastidious mother, I was allowed to gather and collect the abundant, varied, and often smelly evidence of my vehement passion for nature."

Lionni's life changed dramatically when his parents left him with his paternal grandparents in Brussels, Belgium, while they traveled to America in hopes of reviving his father's failing career. Although he was 12 years old at the time, Lionni later remembered little about this first of many moves. "No matter how meticulously I search among the confused images of my childhood, I do not find a single scene of my departure from Amsterdam, of the trip, or of my arrival in Brussels," he commented. Lionni lived with his grandparents for two years. During this time, he continued his nature observations at his grandparents' large pond, collected postcards of the artistic masterpieces held in the Louvre museum in France, assembled his first radio from a kit, became fluent in French, and learned a good deal of English.

Moving Around the World

After two years in Belgium, Lionni finally joined his parents in the United States. "It is clear to me the event must have been one of great importance, for it meant not only that I would rejoin my family, small as it was, but that my life was going to shift to a newer and altogether different gear and take me to what was going to be the Fatherland of my Future," he stated. The family lived in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in an industrial area that had quickly been changed over to residential. Lionni found many things about his new home to be foreign and strange. In his family's

apartment, for example, his bed was a box that swung down from the wall with the push of a button. As he settled in, though, Lionni found that Philadelphia had many historical buildings to explore, and he also began playing basketball.

Only one year after arriving in America, Lionni learned that the family would be moving again. His father, who worked for the Atlantic Refining Company, was asked to manage the company's Italian branch in Genoa. And so Lionni moved to Italy and learned Italian, his fifth language. He and his family stayed in a luxury hotel on a hill with a full view of the ancient city. "Sometimes during the day, when the ground floor of the hotel was deserted, Mother and I, alone in the lobby and its adjoining halls, struck by a sudden fit of foolishness, would chase each other wildly around sofas, armchairs, and potted palms. Those first months in Italy stand out in my memory as the happiest times I ever spent with Mother alone," Lionni remembered.

As a young boy Lionni loved animals, many of which he kept in an aquarium in his bedroom. "It was my zoo, my botany laboratory. For there, with the miraculous consent of my otherwise fastidious mother, I was allowed to gather and collect the abundant, varied, and often smelly evidence of my vehement passion for nature."

The family eventually settled into an apartment on a quiet residential street. Lionni had his own room and was allowed to furnish it himself. "I was the son of an important foreign industrialist, I had reached an age that entitled me to opinions, and now I had a beautiful room of my own with Renaissance furniture and a real German easel," he wrote. "Clearly I was no longer a transient. This was home, and everything seemed to have conspired to make me feel secure and happy."

EDUCATION

Because Lionni moved around so much during his early years, he attended a wide variety of schools in Holland, Belgium, the United States, Italy, and Switzerland. Of his early school days in Amsterdam, Lionni recalled his geography lessons: "The teacher gave us blind maps of Holland and Europe on which we were to write the names of towns and rivers next to the tiny dots. Say 'Holland' and I still see that pale blue map; but now I

couldn't place more than half a dozen names." While living with his grandparents in Brussels, Lionni attended a public school a few blocks from the town square. "Two years! And yet I cannot muster the face of a single teacher, a single companion, a single meaningful event," he noted. Lionni remembered more about his year at the Penn Charter School in Philadelphia, though: "School took up most of my time. I made fast progress in English, and as the headmaster testified on my report card, 'In a few more months he should be speaking like an American.'"

Moving from Philadelphia to Genoa, Italy, Lionni found himself faced with a new challenge. He spent ten months with a tutor preparing for the entrance examinations to attend an Italian high school. He was finally admitted to a four-year program at the Istituto Tecnico Superiore Vittorio Emanuele Terzo. This school would train him to become a licensed busi-

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ness administrator. Although he was usually a good student, Lionni struggled at the Italian school. "My first days at school could not have been more of a culture shock had I been in Libya or Thailand," he recalled. "Unlike my three previous schools, not only was Vittorio Emanuele a mixed school but the girls were in the majority." In fact, one of the only positive things about his schooling in Italy was that he met his future wife, Nora Maffi.

Lionni came up with the idea for his first children's book, **Little Blue and Little Yellow,** *while on a train trip with his grandchildren. "I did not set out to make a book but to entertain two restless grandchildren as we took a commuter train from New York to Connecticut. From* **Life** *magazine I tore a few small pieces of colored paper and improvised a story—the adventure of two colors. The children were glued to their seats and after a happy ending I had to start all over again. That evening, I made a rough dummy. My first book was born."*

After three difficult years at the Italian high school, Lionni decided to skip his fourth year and instead began auditing courses at the University of Zurich in Switzerland at the age of 19. "It was a strange year," he recalled. "For the first time in my life I tasted the light, inebriating pleasures of being free and independent, although now and then I was surprised by my indifference. . . . I played the part of a student in economics at a university where I had not even been formally admitted."

Deep down, Lionni realized that he was not cut out to be a businessman. So he sent his father a letter with a proposal. He wished to quit Zurich and instead try to enter a three-year course in film directing in Rome. But Lionni's father realized that his son really wanted to be an artist. So he traveled to Zurich and proposed that Lionni come home and think things over until the next fall, spending the time in-between painting and visiting with friends. "It was ironic that it should have been Father who made a suggestion that I had never dared consider, certain that he would violently oppose my not completing some kind of formal education, no matter what," he noted. And so Lionni returned home to Genoa and spent the next several months painting, thinking, reading, and writing. He also married Nora Maffi in 1931. They would eventually have two sons together, Mannie and Paolo.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

Finding a "Real" Job

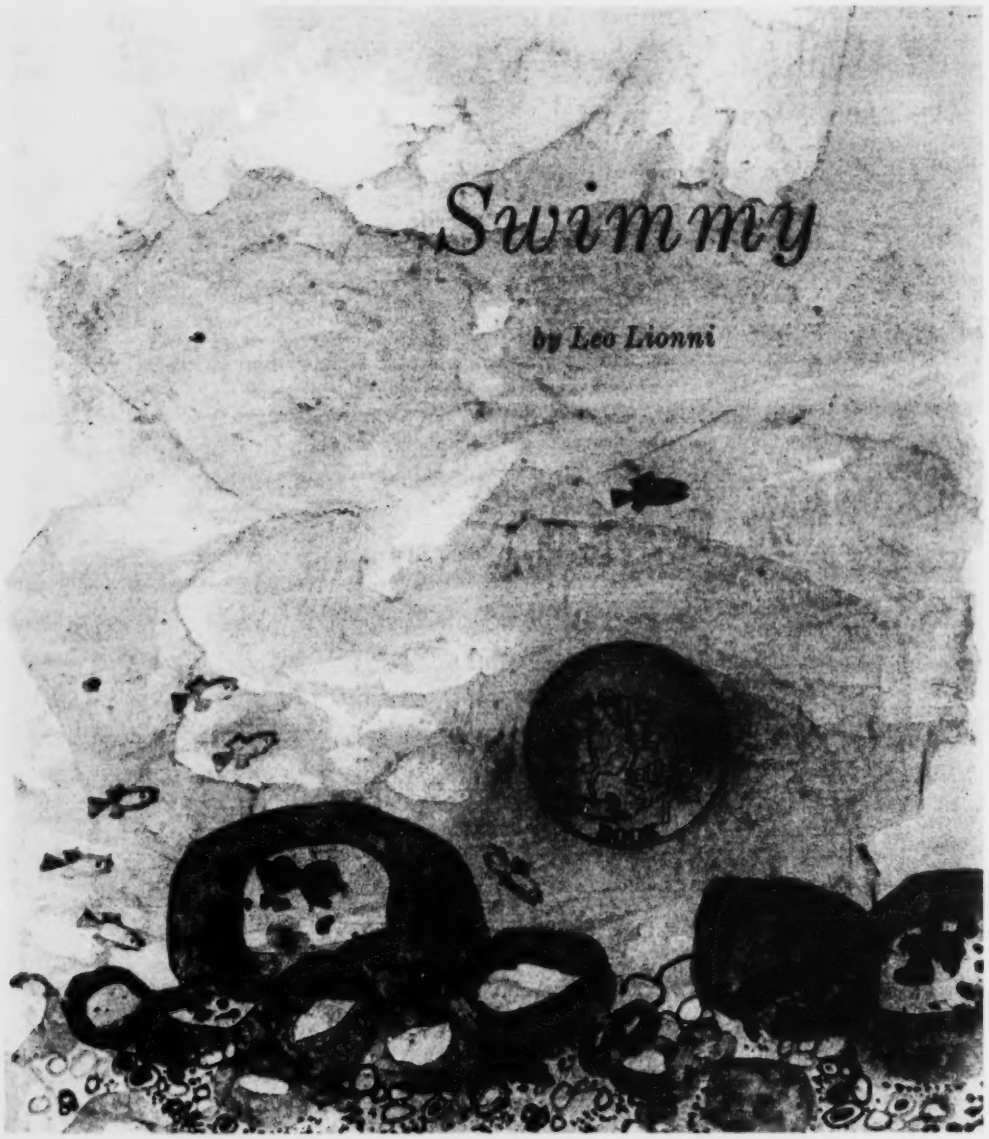
The first few months after his wedding Lionni sought to fulfill a promise he had made to Nora's father—to get a "real" job. He began work at Societa Foltzer, an Italian petroleum company. "All I remember of the 'real' job during the five months I worked as assistant cashier at the Foltzer headquarters are the mechanical adding machine with its long, rotating mahogany handle, . . . and the three enormous books in which I had to register all incoming payments with a fine calligrapher's pen." During this time, Lionni received an invitation to show six of his paintings in an exhibition in Savona, Italy.

With the arrival of his first son, Lionni began thinking about making some changes in his life. First, he decided to quit his job and give all his time to painting. Second, he made plans to return to Amsterdam, where his parents had recently moved. "Little by little, I began to fantasize that perhaps emigrating to Holland would give us a unique opportunity to start from scratch and, in a totally new environment and new circumstances, reinvent our lives," he recalled. In 1933, Lionni and his family moved to Amsterdam. While there, Lionni became a traveling salesman of stationery supplies. He would have stuck with this job if he had not discovered that he was scheduled to be drafted into the Dutch army. Rather than serving in the military, Lionni returned to Milan, and his family joined him a few months later.

After his arrival in Milan in 1934, Lionni continued to struggle to find a career path he could enjoy. He became an architecture critic for *Casabella,* a monthly architectural magazine, and even designed and built a few houses on the Maffi family's property. He also worked as an architectural photographer and designed print advertisements and window displays for the Italian confectionary company Motta. During this time, Lionni resumed his study of economics. He earned a Ph.D. from the University of Genoa in 1935.

Advertising Success in America

In 1936 Lionni opened a small design studio, where he worked for two years. In 1938, however, he decided to leave Europe. At this time, Adolf Hitler and his Nazi political party had taken control of the government of Germany. Hitler immediately enacted laws that restricted the activities of Jews, Gypsies, and other ethnic groups he viewed as inferior. Over time, the Nazis' persecution of Jews escalated into the Holocaust. During World



War II (1939-1945), Hitler and the Nazis invaded neighboring countries in Europe and murdered millions of Jews, Poles, and other people. Lionni, whose father was Jewish, became alarmed at these developments. He and his wife traveled to Switzerland to have their second child, Paolo. Then Lionni, leaving his family behind, left Europe for the United States; he became a naturalized American citizen a few years later. At first, his wife and children were unable to get visas to enter the U.S., so they stayed behind in Switzerland, planning to join him as soon as possible.

After moving to New York City, Lionni tried unsuccessfully to find a job through employment agencies. Then he met the art director of N.W. Ayer,

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one of the largest advertising agencies in the country. "Charles Coiner came toward me with a big smile," Lionni remembered of the interview. "I must have been trembling with anxiety as I stood face to face with the most famous and progressive art director in America, the man who had the power to decide on my fate then and there and who, in a way, did." Lionni was delighted when Coiner offered him a job as an assistant art director in Ayer's Philadelphia office. A short time later, his career took off when he got involved with the birth of a slogan for the *Ladies' Home Journal*—"Never Underestimate the Power of a Woman!" Lionni brought the slogan to life by drawing close to 100 cartoons that appeared in the *New Yorker* and other leading magazines.

In mid-1939, Lionni's wife and children finally got visas to join him in America. Luckily, his success with the *Ladies' Home Journal* ad campaign had earned him enough money to pay their fares on the last ocean liner to leave Italy before it entered World War II. Everyone at work pitched in to help him find and furnish an apartment before they arrived. He continued working at Ayer until 1947. During that time he was the head art director for such big accounts as the Container Corporation of America and the Ford Motor Company. As art director for the ad campaign for Container Corp., Lionni developed a powerful, sophisticated campaign. This series of ads, called "The Great Ideas of Western Man," included daring new work from some of the best-known modern artists, including Alexander Calder, Fernand Leger, Man Ray, and Willem de Kooning. The enormous prestige that Lionni garnered with this work brought him to the forefront of his profession as an art director.

As Lionni's career in advertising flourished, he also resumed his painting. He was honored with his first solo exhibition at the Norlyst Gallery in New York in the mid-1940s. Eventually, he began to realize that advertising was not for him. In 1947, Lionni spent a year in Italy with his family, painting. When they returned to the U.S. in 1948, he decided that he was through with advertising and decided to open his own graphic design studio in New York.

For the next 20 years, Lionni "and a handful of other great creative talents remade American graphic design," according to Barbara Bader in *Horn Book*. He produced notable work for the Olivetti typewriter company, the American Cancer Society, and many other organizations. In 1955, he worked on Edward Steichen's "Family of Man" exhibit at the museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in New York City. Edward Steichen was a renowned photographer who was one of the leaders in the movement to gain acceptance of photography as a fine art. As director of the photogra-

phy department at MOMA, he mounted this celebrated exhibit of 503 pictures of people from around the world. "Family of Man" later toured the globe and sold 3 million copies in book form. The "Family of Man" exhibit is considered one of the greatest photography expositions ever, and Lionni's work as art director for both the museum exhibit and the exhibition catalog was highly acclaimed. In addition to the free-lance design work he did in his studio, Lionni acted as the art director for *Fortune* magazine and edited the stylish trade magazine *Print*, bringing it to the creative forefront of the design profession and making it represent those who believed that graphic design is an integral part of the arts. In the spring of 1959, however, Lionni made another of his life-changing decisions. He vowed to quit *Fortune*, as well as his other major projects, sell his house, and move to Italy to dedicate himself to the arts. "I had always had the capacity to walk away from situations without the slightest trace of the fear or regret that one would normally associate with such an act," he explained.

Writing and Illustrating Children's Books

Before Lionni could put his plan into place, however, he unexpectedly launched a new career as a children's book writer and illustrator. He came up with the idea for his first children's book, called *Little Blue and Little Yellow* (1959), while on a train trip with his young grandchildren, ages three and five. "I did not set out to make a book but to entertain two restless grandchildren as we took a commuter train from New York to Connecticut," Lionni recalled. "From *Life* magazine I tore a few small pieces of colored paper and improvised a story—the adventure of two colors. The children were glued to their seats and after a happy ending I had to start all over again. That evening, I made a rough dummy. My first book was born." The abstract and modern art work of *Little Blue and Little Yellow* was considered revolutionary in the world of children's books at that time, although it was, for Lionni, a continuation of the art he had been exploring for years.

Lionni ended up producing more than 30 children's books over the next four decades. His books have proved popular with readers and critics alike, and have received many awards. For example, four of his books—*Inch by Inch*, *Swimmy*, *Frederick*, and *Alexander and the Wind-Up Mouse*—have been named Caldecott Honor Books, selected by the American Library Association as among the best-illustrated books published in that year.

In his children's books, Lionni typically used strong design elements and vibrant color, attesting to his experiences as an artist and graphic design-

er. His artwork mixed collage and color to create a rich, textured look. Filled with small animal characters, his fables celebrated individuality and often dealt with serious issues like friendship, cooperation, and honesty, albeit in a playful way. Many of his books, in fact, provided humorous takes on events in his own life. Lionni summarized his own view of his books in a 1988 speech before the Library of Congress. In discussing *Inch by Inch*, he said that it "seems to have embodied all the qualities I later demanded of my work. It is a short animal fable told in words and images that are clear, simple, and memorable; it has a well-defined stylistic coherence between text and illustrations; its tone is light and humorous; and although it doesn't have an explicit moral, it invites search for meaning. . . . It is now increasingly clear to me that what characterized *Inch by Inch* was the simplicity and strength of the *idea* that generated it. And it has become clear that making illustrated fables is *not* child's play."

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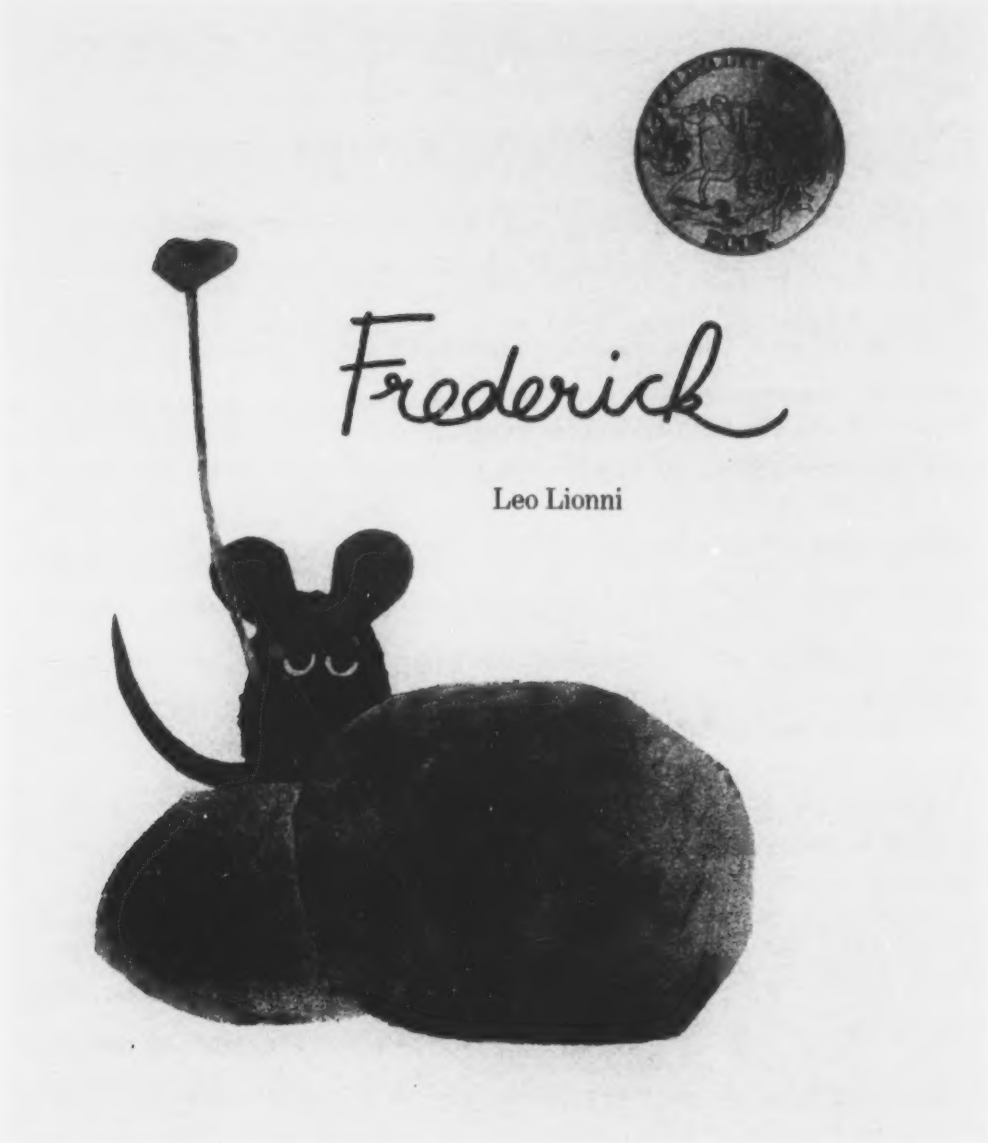
Lionni wrote many books beloved by children and their parents. *Inch by Inch* (1960) focuses on a little caterpillar who avoids being eaten by birds by offering to measure things for them. Lionni admitted that the story reflected his life in advertising, when he "made a living telling people things that they didn't need to know." Another of his most popular books, *Frederick* (1967) tells the story of a young field mouse who prefers to enjoy the sunshine and scenery rather than helping his family gather food for the winter. When their food supply runs low, he helps them make it through the tough times by entertaining them with tales of summer. Frederick's emergence as a storyteller and poet, and his family's recognition of the value of art, reflected Lionni's own growth as an artist.



His book *Alexander and the Wind-Up Mouse* (1969) is an endearing story about friendship and magic. It tells the story of Alexander, a mouse whose best friend is a mechanical wind-up mouse named Willy. Alexander envies the attention that Willy receives from the children in the family, until Willy is broken and tossed aside. But Alexander turns to magic for help in bringing his friend back to life.

Lionni's favorite among his own works was *Swimmy* (1963). This beloved fable tells the story of a tiny black fish whose whole family is eaten by a hungry large fish. Swimmy eventually finds another school of small fish and comes up with an ingenious way to protect his new family from

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predators. The small colorful fish swim in a tight formation that looks like a large fish, with tiny black Swimmy as the eye. Lionni viewed *Swimmy* as his first real fable, and claimed that it served as a model for most of the books that came after it. "*Swimmy* was the book that for the first time led me to consider the making of books as, if not my main activity, one that was no less important than my painting and my newly discovered sculpture," he observed.

Recent Activities

Beginning in the 1960s, Lionni lived primarily in Italy, with an apartment in New York City. In addition to creating children's books, he continued painting, started sculpting, spoke in school classrooms, and taught at colleges and universities. His art was shown in numerous galleries and museums around the world over the years. It also appeared in permanent collections at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, and the Bratislava Museum in Czechoslovakia.

Lionni also continued to create new books during this time. In 1983 he created a four-book series of picture books for the very youngest readers that includes pictures to talk about on the subjects of who, what, where, and when; and in 1985 he created another four-book series, this time about colors, letters, numbers, and words. Some other favorites among his later works include *Cornelius* (1983), a fun and appealing fable about what happens when a crocodile learns to walk upright; *Nicholas, Where Have You Been?* (1987), about a little mouse who learns an important lesson; *Matthew's Dream* (1991), a joyful, gentle, and enchanting story in which a small mouse learns to see the world as an artist; *A Busy Year* (1992), a deceptively simple tale in which twin mice become friends with a tree and watch it change through the year; and *An Extraordinary Egg* (1994), a funny story of mistaken identity about three frogs who watch what they think is a chicken egg hatching—and out crawls a four-legged, green, scaly creature. Like his earlier works, these later books have the charming illustrations, warm emotions, and endearing animal characters that are so appreciated by his young readers.

In 1997, Lionni published *Between Two Worlds: An Autobiography of Leo Lionni*. Narrated by a master storyteller, it gives a full account of his fascinating life, in Europe and in the United States, from his early childhood, to his work as a graphic designer, to his development as an author. It's a fascinating look at the evolution of an artist. That same year was also marked by the publication of an interesting book about Lionni's work: *The Girl with the Brown Crayon* by Vivian Gussin Paley. An accomplished

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kindergarten teacher in the University of Chicago Laboratory School. Paley has recounted her experiences in the classroom in several books. In *The Girl with the Brown Crayon*, Paley talks about her students' close connection to Lionni's works. The students felt so strongly about his books that they spent the entire school year studying them, comparing the characters and the messages in the different books. "I saw this book, and I couldn't believe it," Lionni said at the time. "It's only really now that I've begun to realize to its full extent that what I'm doing or what I've done is important."

In the late 1990s Lionni revealed that he had developed Parkinson's disease, a progressive neurological disorder that affects the nerves that carry electrical signals within the brain. In his last years, he suffered from some of the common symptoms of the disease, including a tremor in his hands and difficulty walking. At the time, Lionni admitted that his problems with Parkinson's sometimes "plunge me into shameful outbursts of self-pity." Still, his mind stayed acute, and he maintained his love of life. "Luckily, I am still too strongly motivated by my love of life and its pleasures, especially my work, and too tempted by an irrepressible *mot d'esprit* or an unavoidable pun to let my personal little tragedy take command." He remained, in the words of Bruce McCall in the *New York Times Book Review*, "a man with [an] exquisitely fine-tuned creative imagination, a clear mind, perfect taste, and mercilessly high standards." Leo Lionni died on October 11, 1999. He was 89.

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

Lionni met his wife, Nora Maffi, while he was attending high school in Italy. He formed a very close bond with the Maffi family and actually dated his wife's sister, Adda. But Lionni soon settled on Nora as the true object of his affection. "She loved to have fun, the sillier the better," he recalled. "I was enchanted by her directness, the clarity and simplicity of her soul. We danced the Charleston and talked foolishness. And one day we discovered that we had fallen in love." The young couple was married on December 23, 1931. They had two sons together, Mannie and Paolo. In recent years, Leo and Nora divided their time between a home in Italy and an apartment in New York.

HOBBIES AND OTHER INTERESTS

Lionni's interests included all forms of art, music, literature, traveling, and politics. He particularly liked flamenco music and dancing, and especially enjoyed traveling in India.

WRITINGS

Self-Illustrated Children's Books

Little Blue and Little Yellow, 1959
Inch by Inch, 1960
On My Beach There Are Many Pebbles, 1961
Swimmy, 1963
Tico and the Golden Wings, 1964
Frederick, 1967
The Alphabet Tree, 1968
The Biggest House in the World, 1968
Alexander and the Wind-Up Mouse, 1969
Fish Is Fish, 1970
Theodore and the Talking Mushroom, 1971
The Greentail Mouse, 1973
In the Rabbitgarden, 1975
A Color of His Own, 1975
Pezzettino, 1975
A Flea Story: I Want to Stay Here! I Want to Go There! 1977
Geraldine, the Music Mouse, 1979
Let's Make Rabbits: A Fable, 1982
Cornelius, 1983
Who? 1983
What? 1983
Where? 1983
When? 1983
Frederick's Fables: A Leo Lionni Treasury of Favorite Stories, 1985
Letters to Talk About, 1985
Numbers to Talk About, 1985
Colors to Talk About, 1985
Words to Talk About, 1985
It's Mine! 1986
Nicholas, Where Have You Been? 1987
Six Crows, 1988
Tillie and the Wall, 1989
Frederick and His Friends, 1989
Matthew's Dream, 1991
A Busy Year, 1992
Mr. McMouse, 1992
Let's Play, 1993
An Extraordinary Egg, 1994

Other

Design for the Printed Page, 1960
Il Taccuino di Leo Lionni ("Leo Lionni's Notebook"), 1972
Parallel Botany, 1977
Leo Lionni at the Library of Congress: A Lecture for International Children's Book Day, Presented on May 12, 1988, 1992
Between Worlds: The Autobiography of Leo Lionni, 1997

HONORS AND AWARDS

Art Director of the Year (National Society of Art Directors): 1955
Gold Medal (Architectural League of New York): 1956
Citation of Honor (Philadelphia Museum College of Art): 1959
Best Illustrated Award (*New York Times*): 1959, for *Little Blue and Little Yellow;* 1963, for *Swimmy;* 1967, for *Frederick*
Lewis Carroll Shelf Award: 1962, for *Inch by Inch*
Children's Book Prize (Germany): 1963, for *Inch by Inch*
Notable Book Citation (American Library Association): 1964, for *Swimmy;* 1968, for *Frederick;* 1970, for *Fish Is Fish;* 1970, for *Alexander and the Wind-Up Mouse*
Deutscher Jugendpreis Illustrated Book Award (Germany): 1965, for *Swimmy*
Golden Apple Award (Bratislava Biennale): 1967, for *Swimmy*
Graham Foundation Grant: 1967
Christopher Award: 1970, for *Alexander and the Wind-up Mouse*
Hall of Fame Award (New York Art Directors Club Hall of Fame): 1974
George G. Stone Center for Children's Books Award: 1976, for body of work
Gold Medal (American Institute of Graphic Arts): 1984
Jane Addams Children's Book Award: 1988, for *Nicholas, Where Have You Been?*

FURTHER READING

Books

Contemporary Authors New Revision Series, Vol. 38, 1993
Cummins, Julie, ed. *Children's Book Illustration and Design,* 1992
Hoffman, Miriam, and Eva Samuels, eds. *Authors and Illustrators of Children's Books: Writings on Their Lives and Works,* 1972
Jagusch, Sybille A., ed. *Leo Lionni at the Library of Congress: A Lecture for International Children's Book Day, Presented on May 12, 1988,* 1992

Lionni, Leo. *Between Worlds: The Autobiography of Leo Lionni,* 1997
Paley, Vivian Gussin. *The Girl with the Brown Crayon,* 1997
Something about the Author, Vol. 72, 1993
Twentieth Century Children's Writers, 1995

Periodicals

American Artist, Apr. 1953, p.30
Booklist, Jan. 1, 1991, p.930
Boston Globe, Nov. 2, 1997, p.N2
Chicago Tribune, Nov. 9, 1997, Books sec., p.1
Christian Science Monitor, Dec. 16, 1985, p.29
Current Biography Yearbook 1997
Horn Book, May 15, 1998, p.322
Los Angeles Times Book Review, Apr. 27, 1997, p.7
Nation, June 2, 1997, p.25
New York Times, Sep. 4, 1997, p.C4; Oct. 17, 1999, p.54
New York Times Book Review, May 2, 1976, p.30; May 18, 1997, p.13
Publishers Weekly, Apr. 5, 1991, p.118
Wilson Library Bulletin, May 1970, p.947; June 1992, p.56

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Francine Pascal 1938-

American Author of Books for Children and Teenagers
Creator of the *Sweet Valley* Series

BIRTH

Francine Pascal was born Francine Rubin on May 13, 1938, in New York City. Her father, William Rubin, worked as an auctioneer, and her mother, Kate (Dunitz) Rubin, stayed home to take care of Francine and her two older brothers, Michael and Burt.

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YOUTH

When Francine was five years old, her family moved across the East River from busy Manhattan to peaceful Jamaica, Queens. "The houses had yards, and it was safe enough for kids to play unattended in the street," she recalled. "If it weren't for the subway station on the corner, it would almost have been like living in a small town." She enjoyed playing outdoors with neighborhood kids and going to the movies once a week with her friends.

Pascal's favorite pastime as a child was reading. She especially liked to read adventure comics and fairy tales because they appealed to her imagination. "I have always had a very active imagination—my retreat when things don't go right," she stated. "I realized early that this set me apart from most people. For example, it wasn't my habit to confide in others very much, particularly my parents. As far back as I can recall, I kept a diary. Important thoughts, imaginings, and events were recounted in my diaries, not to people."

> ***"I absolutely hated high school. Learning by rote made the whole system repressive. Adolescence is pretty awful no matter when you go through it. And all of us think high school is wonderful for everyone else. The* Sweet Valley *series come out of what I fantasized high school was like for everyone but me."***

Pascal also enjoyed writing as a girl. "I began to write poetry when I was about eight. My oldest brother, Michael Stewart, grew up to be a very successful playwright with such theater pieces as *Hello, Dolly!, Forty-Second Street,* and *Bye-Bye Birdie* to his credit. Michael was the brother I idolized and since he was a writer, I wanted to write, too," she remembers. "Writing in general, and my brother's in particular, were taken very seriously. Mine was not, at least not within the family." Nevertheless, Pascal often wrote her own plays, cast her friends in various roles, and staged performances for neighborhood audiences.

EDUCATION

Pascal attended the New York City public schools. Like many teenagers, she found high school to be a difficult time, especially the memorization it required. "I absolutely hated high school. Learning by rote made the

whole system repressive," she recalled. "Adolescence is pretty awful no matter when you go through it. And all of us think high school is wonderful for everyone else. The *Sweet Valley* series come out of what I fantasized high school was like for everyone but me."

But Pascal enjoyed her college years at New York University. "I went to NYU during the days when Washington Square Park was filled with poets and musicians," she said. "It was wonderful, everything I had dreamed it would be. I was writing poetry and felt very much a part of it all." She earned a bachelor's degree from NYU in 1958.

FIRST JOBS

Around the time Francine graduated from college, she met John Pascal, a free-lance journalist who would soon become her husband. He encouraged her to pursue writing as a career. She became a journalist as well, writing articles for a variety of magazines, including *True Confessions, Modern Screen, Ladies' Home Journal,* and *Cosmopolitan.*

In 1965, Pascal and her husband became writers for a television soap opera called "The Young Marrieds." The head writers would provide them with the main story line each day. Then the Pascals would compose the dialogue that the actors read on the air. Francine wrote the female parts, while her husband wrote the male parts. But they quit their jobs a few years later when production of the show relocated to California.

In 1968, the Pascals worked with Francine's brother, Michael Stewart, on a musical about the life of theater actor and producer George M. Cohan. This play, *George M!,* became a hit on Broadway. In 1974, the Pascals collaborated on a nonfiction book called *The Strange Case of Patty Hearst.* This book told the story of how Hearst, a newspaper heiress, was kidnapped by a terrorist group and brainwashed into helping them commit bank robberies.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

Writing Young Adult Novels

Pascal enjoyed her work as a free-lance writer and journalist for a while, but she eventually realized that it was not what she wanted to do with her life. "I've never really enjoyed writing nonfiction, and was beginning to feel locked into that genre," she admitted. One morning, as she was lying in bed, she suddenly got an idea for a young adult novel. "What if a 13-year-old girl who didn't get along with her mother went back in time and be-

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came her mother's best friend?" she thought. Pascal had never written a novel, and she certainly didn't know anything about writing for young people. But her husband encouraged her to begin working on the book immediately.

Once Pascal had finished her manuscript, she sent it to three different literary agents. To her amazement, all of them wanted to publish it. She sold the rights to her first novel within two weeks. The book, *Hangin' Out with Cici,* was published in 1977. It tells the story of Victoria, a spoiled teenager who causes trouble at home and can't get along with her mother. On a weekend visit with her aunt, Victoria is caught smoking marijuana and sent home early. But on the train home, she dreams that she has gone back in time to 1944. In her dream, Victoria makes friends with a girl named Cici who shoplifts, sneaks cigarettes, and buys the answers to school tests. She eventually realizes that her wild new friend Cici is actually her mother as a young girl. Victoria finally wakes up to find that she is still on the train and it has all been a dream. But from that time on, she has a stronger relationship with her mother.

Critics praised *Hangin' Out with Cici* for its realistic characters and sense of humor. In 1981, the book became an *ABC Afterschool Special* called *My Mother Was Never a Kid.* Pascal continued the adventures of Victoria in two later books, *My First Love and Other Disasters* (1979) and *Love and Betrayal and Hold the Mayo!* (1985).

Creating the *Sweet Valley* Series

In the late 1970s, Pascal began working on an idea for a television soap opera aimed at teenagers. She never managed to interest television producers in the idea, but eventually a book editor suggested that she try writing a series of teen novels instead. Pascal immediately began thinking about what it would take to make kids want to read a series of novels. "Each book, I concluded, would have to be a complete story in itself, but

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with a hook ending to lead you to the sequel," she stated. "The series would have to have vivid continuing characters. When I came up with the idea for Elizabeth and Jessica, the Jekyll and Hyde twins, I was off and running."

Like all its later spinoffs, the original series, *Sweet Valley High,* revolves around the identical twins Elizabeth and Jessica Wakefield. They live in sunny Sweet Valley, a fictional town in California, and attend Sweet Valley High School. Both girls are beautiful and popular, but they have completely opposite personalities. Elizabeth is sweet, friendly, and studious, while Jessica is stuck up, flirtatious, and conniving. "The trick is to think of Elizabeth and Jessica as the good and bad sides of one person," says their creator. The stories focus on the twins and their friends as they deal with personal issues like boyfriends and relationships. "They're romances in the classic sense," Pascal explained. "They deal with the ideals of love, honor, friendship, sacrifice, which accounts for the popularity of the series."

"I maintain artistic control over every aspect of these novels. I may not write every word, but they are very much mine. Every now and then—it is rare—a writer tries to go off and create his or her own thing. When that happens, the whole book must be redone and that writer is fired. They must trust that these series are working, that my plots and characters are the keys to our success."

Pascal doesn't write all the books herself. First, she comes up with the basic story line for each book. "I do all the plot outlines, descriptions of characters, time setting, and so forth. I love plot twists and the conflicts between good and evil." These plot outlines aren't formulaic, she says. "If I don't choke up at the end of an outline, it's no good, and I go back to the typewriter. It's really got to get you right there," she says, pointing to her heart. But the actual writing is done by other people. "It would be impossible to do them without a stable of writers. They come out at the rate of one a month plus periodic super editions," she explained. "I created something I call a Bible. It was an entire story of Sweet Valley. The history of the town, the families, the people in it. It set the whole world of Sweet Valley. We hire writers, they take my outline, and they follow it carefully. The idea is that it has a certain style and stamp that's mine, and it must be transferred to each book." For Pascal, maintaining the consis-

tency of the series is key. "I maintain artistic control over every aspect of these novels. I may not write every word, but they are very much mine. Every now and then—it is rare—a writer tries to go off and create his or her own thing. When that happens, the whole book must be redone and that writer is fired. They must trust that these series are working, that my plots and characters are the keys to our success."

A Publishing Phenomenon

Bantam Books began publishing the *Sweet Valley High* series in 1983, and it quickly became a huge hit with readers. In fact, Pascal made publishing history in 1985, when *Perfect Summer* (the first *Sweet Valley High* super edition) became the first young adult novel ever to appear on the best-seller list of the *New York Times*. Since then, over 450 *Sweet Valley* titles have been published, which have sold over 100 million copies and have been translated into more than 20 languages.

Based on the success of the original series, Pascal knew the books would appeal to all ages. *Sweet Valley High* is written at a reading level that's comfortable for middle school kids. So Pascal helped to create new series for both younger and older readers, adapting *Sweet Valley High* to suit the different experiences and interests of the different age groups. The *Sweet Valley Kids* series, which features the Wakefield twins as six-year-olds, is written for lower elementary students; the *Sweet Valley Twins* series, which shows the girls as sixth graders, is written for upper elementary readers; and the *Sweet Valley University* series, which follows the story of Elizabeth and Jessica in college, is written for middle and high school students. In many of the series there are also special mini-series, like Jessica and Elizabeth's secret diaries and super thriller editions with scary subjects. In addition, there are currently four *Sweet Valley* sagas, which trace the ancestry of the residents of Sweet Valley back through several generations. In addition to the books, there are *Sweet Valley* clothes, perfume, school supplies, games, dolls, and even a television show.

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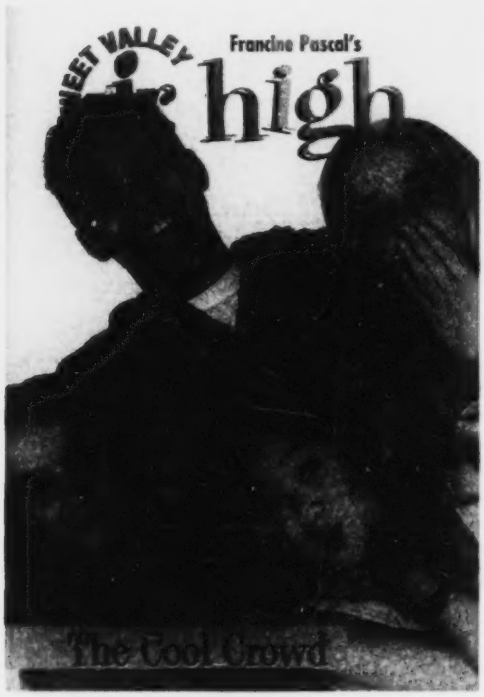
In 1998, three of the existing *Sweet Valley* series were brought to a close. No new books are currently being added to the *Sweet Valley High*, *Sweet Valley Twins*, and *Sweet Valley Kids* series. But the *Sweet Valley University* series will continue, and two new series were added in 1999. The first is *Sweet Valley Jr. High*, which picks up where *Sweet Valley Twins* left off. Jessica and Elizabeth are thrown into a new school without their old friends, and things won't come as easily to them there. The effortless popularity that they've taken for granted is gone, but they will learn some new lessons and meet some new friends. The second new series is *SVH Senior Year*, which picks up where *Sweet Valley High* left off. The old El Carro High School was tragically destroyed in an earthquake. As a result, 500 displaced students from El Carro have moved to Sweet Valley High. The popular kids from Sweet Valley are suddenly dealing with a whole new social order, where their accepted control of the school is being challenged.

Sweet Valley Faces Criticism

Not everyone has been thrilled by the success of Pascal's *Sweet Valley* series. Some fellow writers and educators have criticized the *Sweet Valley* books for their idealized settings, simplistic plots, and one-dimensional characters. They have complained that the series ignores real issues facing teens and doesn't include minority characters. In fact, that was intentional on Pascal's part, as she explains here. "In the beginning, I made Sweet Valley a place right out of MGM. Total fantasy. No minorities, no poverty, nothing in that vein. Then I started getting letters from readers saying that the books were so 'real' to them. This made me realize that I had to introduce some elements of reality, and so we added blacks. They are MGM blacks, to be sure, just like all the other characters in the books. I didn't intend Sweet Valley to be realistic, so I'm a little puzzled. It is a soap opera in book form, after all. I guess what these readers mean is that there is an emotional reality in the relationship between the characters."

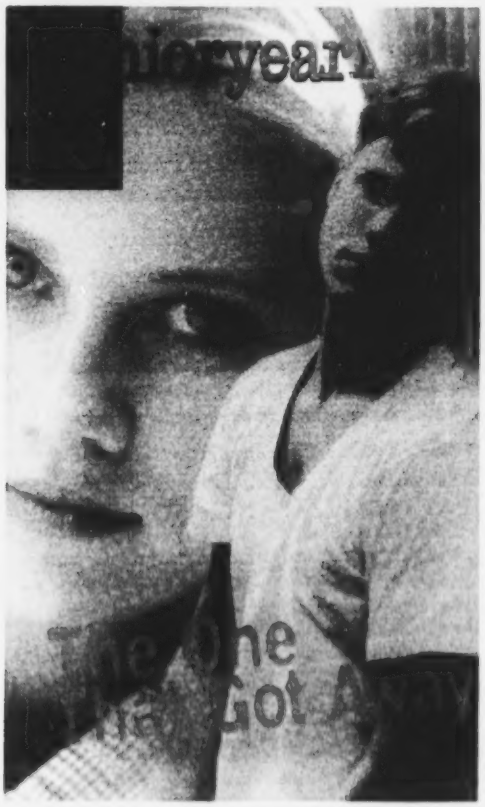


Perhaps the biggest criticism of the *Sweet Valley* series is that it encourages young adults to read in-

substantial books instead of great literature. "It's like eating junk food. It produces an appetite for more junk food," said young adult author Norma Klein. "Children who read nothing but junk really become conditioned to undemanding, slick, fast-moving plots and shallow characterization, and they lose patience with any more demanding books," added Michele Landsberg, the author of a guide to books for young people. Lou Willett Stark concurred, writing in *School Library Journal* that books like *Sweet Valley* encourage young people to read writers like Judith Krantz and Danielle Steele, adult authors whose books are considered shallow by some critics, rather than works by more challenging writers like Charlotte and Emily Bronte and Virginia Woolf.

But Pascal defends her books by claiming that they encourage many teenagers to read. "*Sweet Valley High* opened a market that simply didn't exist before. It is not that those millions of girls were not reading my books, they weren't reading any books. I have gotten many, many letters from kids saying that they never read before *Sweet Valley High*. If nine out of ten of those girls go on to read Judith Krantz and Danielle Steele, so be it, they are still reading," she stated. "I must say there's something extremely disturbing about that kind of criticism. In my opinion it's a form of censorship. It's tantamount to saying, 'Everyone should read what I say, and only what I say is worthwhile.' I say, 'Let everyone read everything. We should all have the freedom to develop our taste.' The reality is that not everyone is able, or wishes to read great literature. There should be books for all types of readers. Reading time is precious; it's a time for privacy, fantasy, learning, a time to live in our imaginations. No one should be denied that."

Pascal responded like this to suggestions that her books encourage kids to read junk instead of great literature. "I must say there's something extremely disturbing about that kind of criticism. In my opinion it's a form of censorship. It's tantamount to saying, 'Everyone should read what I say, and only what I say is worthwhile.' I say, 'Let everyone read everything. We should all have the freedom to develop our taste.' . . . Reading time is precious; it's a time for privacy, fantasy, learning, a time to live in our imaginations. No one should be denied that."



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"Sweet Valley is the essence of high school. The world outside is just an adult shadow going by. The parents barely exist. Action takes place in bedrooms, cars, and school. It's that moment before reality hits, when you really believe in the romantic values—sacrifice, love, loyalty, friendship—before you get jaded and slip off into adulthood."

"

"Pascal has made twins Jessica and Elizabeth Wakefield as much a part of the pre-adolescent reader's world as Big Bird is to the preschooler's," wrote Judy Green of the *Sacramento Bee*. For her part, Pascal is thrilled that her books have brought pleasure to so many young people. "Everybody likes to think they are making a difference in this world," she noted. "When I get a letter from a child saying that *Sweet Valley* has made her enjoy reading, I know I've done something important. And that is truly a wonderful feeling."

Recent Activities

In addition to her work on *Sweet Valley*, Pascal has recently written an adult novel, *If Wishes Were Horses*, that was published in 1994. She has also made plans to introduce a new series for young adults called *Fearless*. This action series focuses on Gaia Moore, a 17-year-old New York high school student. Gaia is a pretty unusual teenager. The daughter of a covert anti-terrorist agent and an international journalist, she's a black belt in karate, a precision marksman, and an amazing runner with the speed of an Olympic athlete. But Gaia lacks the "fear gene" and often finds herself in trouble as a result.

Despite these recent projects, millions of readers still think of Pascal as the creator of *Sweet Valley*. And these books could go on forever, according to Pascal. The themes and experiences in the book are universal, she says, for all teens and in all eras. "No matter when you were born or where, puberty is the same. It's the same for your parents as it is for you — what's happening in your body dictates everything. *Sweet Valley* is the essence of high school. The world outside is just an adult shadow going by. The parents barely exist. Action takes place in bedrooms, cars, and school. It's that moment before reality hits, when you really believe in the romantic values — sacrifice, love, loyalty, friendship — before you get jaded and slip off into adulthood."

ADVICE TO YOUNG WRITERS

Pascal offers this advice to young writers: "Write, write, write. It's the only way to learn your craft. If you've got talent but are undisciplined, you may as well not have talent."

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

Francine Rubin married journalist John Robert Pascal on August 18, 1965. Some sources suggest that this may have been her second marriage, although that has not been confirmed. Francine and John raised three daughters, Laurie, Susan, and Jamie. Sadly, John Pascal died of lung cancer in 1981. "Our life together was a wonderful adventure — a life of writing — every aspect affected by books. We were lucky enough to live in this big old apartment [in New York City]. It was always full of activity, our daughters and their friends, our colleagues and friends, a ridiculously big sheepdog, John's and my writing projects," she related. "It seems unfair that he isn't alive to enjoy the success of my *Sweet Valley* series. He would have gotten a real kick out of it, and could have retired on the money I've made. The house is too quiet now."

To help herself recover from her husband's death, Pascal spent a great deal of time traveling and working in France. She fell in love with the country and eventually purchased a home there. Today, she spends the winter months in her apartment in New York and the summer months in her home in the south of France.

HOBBIES AND OTHER INTERESTS

When she is not writing, Pascal enjoys reading and traveling. She also holds a weekly poker game with a group of writer friends when she is in New York.

SELECTED WRITINGS

Sweet Valley

Sweet Valley High, 144 books, 1983-1998
Sweet Valley Twins, 118 books, 1986-1998
Sweet Valley Kids, 76 books, 1989-1998
Sweet Valley University, 52 books (ongoing), 1993-
SVH Senior Year, 10 books (ongoing), 1999-
Sweet Valley Jr. High, 10 books (ongoing), 1999-

Other Writings

The Strange Case of Patty Hearst, 1974 (with John Pascal)
Hangin' Out with Cici, 1977
My First Love and Other Disasters, 1979
The Hand-Me-Down Kid, 1980
Save Johanna! 1981 (adult novel)
Love and Betrayal and Hold the Mayo! 1985
If Wishes Were Horses, 1994 (adult novel)

HONORS AND AWARDS

Books for the Teenage Citation (New York Public Library): 1978-85, for *Hangin' Out with Cici*
Best Book for Young Adults Citation (American Library Association): 1979, for *My First Love and Other Disasters*
Dorothy Canfield Fisher Children's Book Award (Vermont Congress of Parents and Teachers): 1982, for *The Hand-Me-Down Kid*
Bernard Versele Award (Brussels, Belgium): 1988, for *The Hand-Me-Down Kid*

FURTHER READING

Books

Authors and Artists for Young Adults, Vol. 1, 1989
Drew, Bernard A. *The 100 Most Popular Young Adult Authors*, 1996
Gallo, Donald R. *Speaking for Ourselves, Too: More Autobiographical Sketches by Notable Authors of Books for Young Adults*, 1993
Holtze, Sally Holmes, ed. *Fifth Book of Junior Authors and Illustrators*, 1983
Something about the Author, Vol. 80, 1995

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Chicago Tribune, Mar. 1, 1987, p.C2; Oct. 22, 1991, Style section, p.20
Los Angeles Times, Apr. 20, 1986, View section, p.1
Newsday, Feb. 22, 1987, p.2; Feb. 23, 1987, p.20; Feb. 10, 1988, p.3; Nov. 22, 1992, p.4
Orange County (California) Register, Feb. 26, 1994, p.F4
People, July 11, 1988, p.66
Sacramento Bee, May 15, 1993, p.SC1
Seattle Times, May 8, 1992, p.D1
St. Petersburg Times, June 30, 1987, p.D1
Toronto Star, Apr. 22, 1992, p.E6
Wall Street Journal, Feb. 11, 1988, p.33

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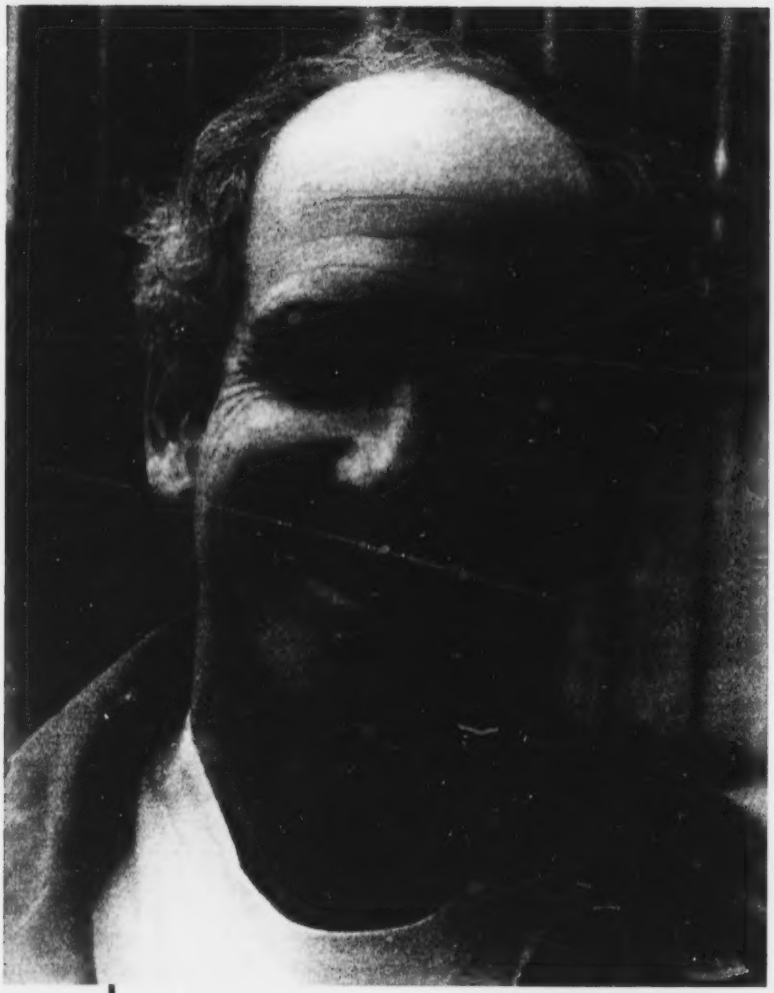

Louis Sachar 1954-

American Writer of Books for Children and Middle-Grade Readers
Author of the *Wayside School* Books and the *Marvin Redpost* Series
Winner of the 1999 Newbery Medal for *Holes*

BIRTH

Louis Sachar (pronounced SACK-er) was born on March 20, 1954, in East Meadow, New York. His father, Robert J. Sachar, was a salesman, and his mother Ruth (Raybin) Sachar, was a real estate broker.

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YOUTH

Growing up in East Meadow, Sachar was afraid to go into the woods near his home. "As a child, I remember having to keep away from the woods across the street, avoiding the older, tough kids who played there," he noted. "Looking back now, those tough kids were probably only 11 or 12 years old." When Sachar was nine, his family moved to Tustin, California. He loved playing in the nearby orange groves with his friends. "We cut through the orange groves on the way to school, and had orange fights on the way home," he recalled. "Now, sadly, most of the groves have been paved over and replaced with fast food restaurants, offices, and housing developments."

EDUCATION

Sachar attended the public schools, first in East Meadow and then in Tustin. Throughout his elementary and middle school years, he enjoyed school and got good grades. He liked to read but was not fond of English classes because he "didn't like analyzing the books to death."

During his high school years in California, Sachar became a bit of a rebel. For example, he wore his hair long and ignored the school's dress code. He also wrote his first story for kids at that time. As part of a creative writing assignment, he wrote a story called "Apple Power" about a mean teacher named Mrs. Gorf who turned her students into apples. Although the teacher was not impressed with the story, others were: it later became part of the Wayside School series.

Upon graduating from high school around 1972, Sachar went to Antioch, a small liberal arts college in Ohio. But he returned to California after his first semester ended. His father had died suddenly, and he decided that he wanted to be closer to his mother. He then took several months off and worked as a salesman for the Fuller Brush Company. "I was great at it," he related. "My employers couldn't understand how I could possibly want to go back to college when I had such a great career ahead of me selling brushes."

Sachar returned to college the next fall at the University of California, Berkeley. He earned a bachelor's degree in economics from the school in 1976. After graduation, he began working for a company in Connecticut that manufactured women's sweaters. But when he got fired after seven months, he decided it was time to continue his education. He earned a law degree from the University of California, San Francisco, in 1980.

BECOMING A WRITER

Even before he started law school, Sachar was not certain that he wanted to become an attorney. He had begun writing books for children during his undergraduate years in college, and he suspected that he might rather become a writer. He started his career as a children's author in an unusual way. As a college student, he found that he enjoyed Russian literature. He then decided that it might be interesting to learn Russian so that he could read his favorite books in the original language. But after taking a year of Russian courses, he decided that it was too difficult and dropped out. Then a strange thing happened as Sachar was looking for another class to replace Russian.

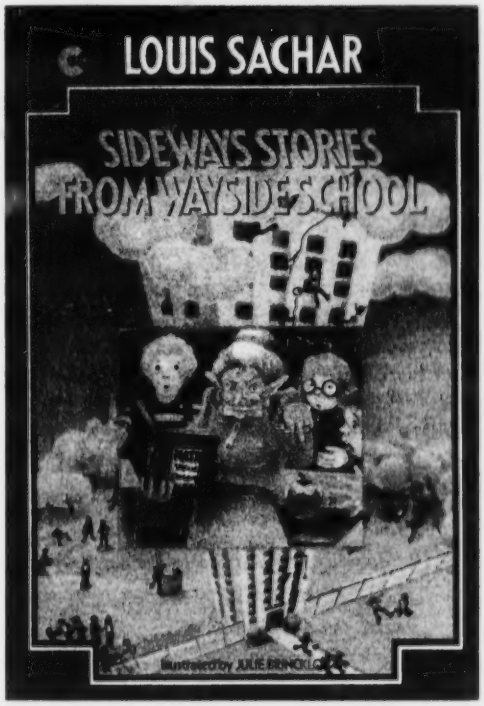
"As I wandered across the campus, I saw an elementary school girl handing out pieces of paper. I took one from her. It read: 'Help. We need teacher's aides at our school. Earn three units of credit,'" he recalled. "Prior to that time I had no interest whatsoever in kids. However, I signed up to be a teacher's aide because I needed to take something other than Russian, and it sounded easy. It turned out to be not only my favorite class, but also the most important class I took during my college career." He ended up working at the elementary school part-time as the playground supervisor during lunch. He loved playing games with the children, who fondly referred to him as "Louis the Yard Teacher."

When Sachar moved to California, he loved playing in the nearby orange groves with his friends. "We cut through the orange groves on the way to school, and had orange fights on the way home. Now, sadly, most of the groves have been paved over and replaced with fast food restaurants, offices, and housing developments."

As he spent time with the students, Sachar began thinking up stories to amuse them. He ended up writing down some short, funny stories with some of the kids he knew from school as the main characters. He did not really plan to become a writer at this point, but he sent the manuscript to several publishers anyway. One of them agreed to publish *Sideways Stories from Wayside School* in 1978, just about the time he began law school.

"My first book was accepted for publication during my first week at University of California, beginning a six-year struggle over trying to decide

between being an author or a lawyer," he stated. "I finished law school, passed the bar [exam], and half-heartedly looked for a law job. Meanwhile, I wrote three more children's books. Finally, I stopped agonizing over the decision and realized it had already been made. I've been an attorney since 1981 but have chosen to devote my time to writing children's books." Sachar practiced law part-time until the early 1990s, when he decided to become a full-time writer.



CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

Since the publication of his first book in 1978, Sachar has become a beloved author of children's books. He's written two sets of books for younger readers, Wayside School and Marvin Redpost, as well as several individual titles as well. His books are filled with humor, but they also deal with many of the same problems that kids confront every day. Recently, Sachar published the award-winning *Holes*, which is considered his finest work to date. *Holes* is Sachar's first book to win him widespread critical recognition, although his readers — kids — have been enjoying his works for 20 years.

The Wayside School Stories

Sachar has written several books of funny stories about the students at the fictional Wayside School: *Sideways Stories from Wayside School* (1978), *Wayside School Is Falling Down* (1989), *Sideways Arithmetic from Wayside School* (1989), and *Wayside School Gets a Little Stranger* (1995). The books contain 30 interconnected stories about the wacky activities at Wayside School. This school is 30 stories high, with one classroom on each floor. The builder mistakenly stacked the classrooms on top of each other rather than lining them up in rows. He also forgot to include an elevator, so students must climb up many flights of stairs to get to their classes.

Sachar's stories show the students and teachers at Wayside in a variety of goofy situations. For example, the third-grade teacher, Mrs. Jewls, demon-

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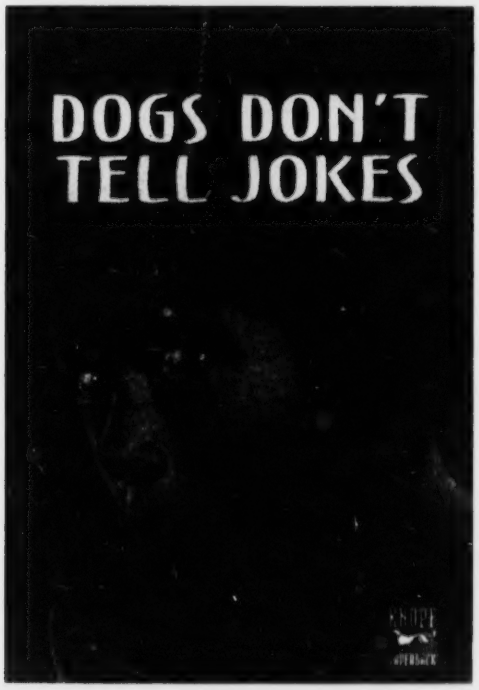

strates gravity by throwing the new computer out of the window on the 30th floor. The stories also include lots of puns and jokes to entertain young readers. For example, the principal of the school is Mr. Kidswatter, and the lunch lady is Miss Mush. Mrs. Jewls tells her students that "It doesn't matter what you wear on the outside. It's what's underneath that counts. If you want to be great and important, you have to wear expensive underpants." These silly and clever books have become huge favorites among young readers, parents, and teachers alike. They have sold over three million copies.

Other Novels

Sachar has also published several individual novels for elementary readers. One of his best-known books is *There's a Boy in the Girls' Bathroom* (1987). It tells the story of Bradley Chalkers, a fifth-grader who feels like an outcast because he is so much bigger than the other kids in his class. Bradley reacts to his self-doubts by becoming a bully and terrorizing his classmates. With the help of a caring school counselor and a new boy who refuses to be intimidated by him, Bradley begins to view himself in a more positive light. Once he accepts himself, the other children are able to accept him as well. At the end of the book, Bradley is invited to a classmate's birthday party for the first time in several years. The book has been warmly received by kids and adults alike. In 1991, Sachar adapted the story into a popular play for the Seattle Children's Theater.

Sachar followed that up with *Sixth Grade Secrets* (1987), about Laura Sibbie. The coolest girl in her sixth grade class, she starts up a secret club, then collects secrets about all its members. With a series of unexpected plot twists, the novel showed all kinds of secrets—secret messages, secret rivals, secret promises, secret crushes—without ever losing its sense of humor. Next up was *The Boy Who Lost His Face* (1989), about a boy, David, who feels cursed: he is dropped by his best friend and then hit with a stint of bad luck. Sachar's sensitive descriptions help readers empathize with David, a passive and awkward boy learning to stand up for himself.

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Another popular book is *Dogs Don't Tell Jokes* (1991), about 12-year-old Gary Boone, called Goon. Gary is a compulsive joke-teller and class clown who's determined to become a stand-up comic. He thinks he's hysterical, but everyone in his class is getting tired of his routine. Then a talent show is announced at his school. In the weeks leading up to it, Gary learns a lot about how to socialize with other kids and about how to develop confidence. Underneath all the jokes, Gary, like Bradley Chalkers in *There's a Boy in the Girls' Bathroom*, is struggling with issues of identity, relationships, and being labeled different by his schoolmates. Sachar's sensitive handling of these difficult issues earned him praise from critics and won him dedicated fans among young readers.

The Marvin Redpost Novels

In 1992, Sachar published *Marvin Redpost: Kidnapped at Birth?*, the first of what has become an entertaining series of easy chapter books about a third-grader who has some odd ideas. In this first book, for example, Marvin becomes convinced that he is actually a prince who was kidnapped at birth by ordinary parents. Sachar went on to write several other books about Marvin, including *Marvin Redpost: Why Pick on Me?* (1993), in which an incident during recess threatens to turn Marvin into a social outcast; *Marvin Redpost: Is He a Girl?* (1993), in which Marvin is fooled by a classmate who tells him that if he can kiss his own elbow, he will turn into a girl; *Marvin Redpost: Alone in His Teacher's House* (1994), in which Marvin goes through a difficult period after he is asked by his teacher to do a favor; and *Marvin Redpost: Class President* (1998), in which the President of the United States unexpectedly visits Marvin's classroom. In the most recent, *Marvin Redpost: A Flying Birthday Cake?* (1999), the arrival of a new student causes upheaval in Marvin's class at school, among his friends, and even with his family at home. In all these books, reviewers typically praise the lively and witty dialogue, the imaginative rendering of the main character, and the depictions of everyday life from a child's perspective, with a sympathetic rendering of childhood problems.

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> ***"Writing for elementary school students, I've tried to recall what it felt like for me to be that age. Despite the notion that times have changed, I think that kids in grade school are basically the same as they were when I was young."***
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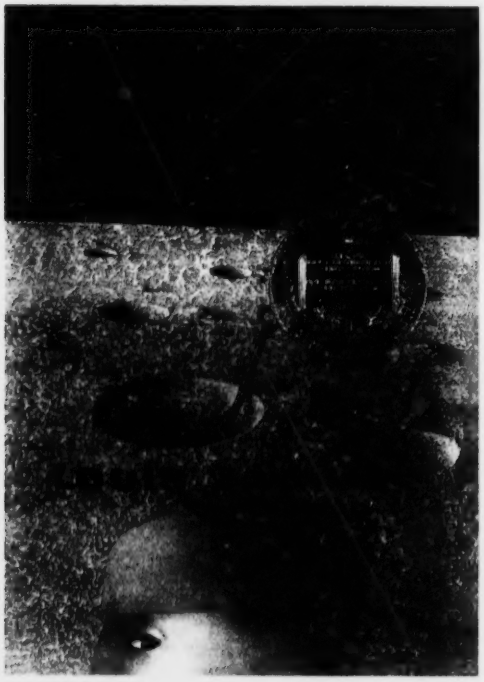

Holes

In 1998, Sachar published what has become his most critically acclaimed book, *Holes*. Although *Holes* still shows his sense of humor and his interest in the absurd aspects of life, it is also more serious than any of his previous books. At the time he began writing it, he had been working on an adult novel for more than two years. On a family vacation to Maine to escape the Texas summer heat, Sachar decided that the adult novel was not working out. He then returned to children's books and started fleshing out an idea for a story about the heat. *Holes* ended up taking him another two years to write—much longer than most of his other books. "Lots of times when I was writing this it felt like uselessly digging holes," he noted. "I like characters who feel victimized, feel left out. Everyone feels that way at times."

Holes tells the story of Stanley Yelnats (his last name is his first name spelled backwards), a sweet, chubby kid from an unlucky family. Ever since his "no-good-dirty-rotten-pig-stealing-great-great-grandfather" was accused of a crime he did not commit, the other members of the family have been blamed for things they did not do. Stanley himself is convicted of stealing a pair of shoes that were donated by a famous basketball player for a celebrity auction. The judge does not believe the truth: that the shoes actually fell out of the sky and hit him on the head. So Stanley ends up serving time at Camp Green Lake, a juvenile detention center located on a dried-up lake bed in the scorching Texas desert.

Every day, Stanley and the other boys at the work camp are each required to dig a hole five feet deep and five feet wide. The warden's philosophy is that "If you take a bad boy and make him dig a hole every day in the hot sun, it will turn him into a good boy." Although the work is hard and mindless, Stanley learns to get along with the other inmates and passes the time by teaching his friend Zero to read. Finally, he and Zero escape from the camp and make their way across the desert. Readers learn the secrets of Stanley's family history and the true purpose of the holes as the

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fast-paced adventure continues. Sachar called the book "a long story about fate, crime, punishment, evil, danger, tenderness, and perseverance—all set in a work camp for juvenile delinquents on a parched, sweltering lake bed in Texas. The state attorney general and some imaginary killer lizards play important roles."

Holes was an immediate success, both with Sachar's longtime fans and with many critics as well. There was widespread praise for the book, much like these comments from a *Horn Book* review by Roger Sutton. "*Holes* is filled with twists in the lane, moments when the action is happily going along only to turn toward somewhere else that you gradually, eventually, sometimes on the last page, realize was the truest destination all along," Sutton wrote. "We haven't seen a book with this much plot, so suspensefully and expertly deployed, in too long a time. And the ending will make you cheer—for the happiness the Yelnats family finally finds—and cry—for the knowledge of how they lost so much for so long. . . . Louis Sachar has long been a great and deserved favorite among children, despite the benign neglect of critics. But *Holes* is witness to its own theme: what goes around comes around. Eventually."

Sachar never tells anyone about a story he is working on until it is done. "By working on a book for a year without talking about it, the story keeps building inside, until it's bursting to be told and the words come pouring out when I sit down to write."

Sachar won a number of prestigious awards for *Holes*, including the National Book Award in the young people's literature category, the Christopher Medal, and the Newbery Medal—the highest honor in children's literature. He noted that critics who once considered him a "literary class clown" now take his work more seriously. "I've always felt like I had lots of respect from my readers but this book catapulted me into a new category in the minds of the establishment," he said. Of course, winning so many awards has also turned his once peaceful life upside-down. Today, Sachar is constantly asked to give talks and visit schools. He has also sold the movie rights to *Holes* and the television rights to several of his other books.

Where Does He Get His Ideas?

On his frequent visits to elementary schools, Sachar is often asked where he gets the ideas for his stories. "It's difficult to say where ideas for stories come from," he stated. "I brainstorm until one idea leads to another which leads to another, and often it is the third or fourth idea which proves salvageable. I've started books, worked on them for a couple of weeks, and then abandoned the story for another. Through my first drafts, I never now what's going to happen, making the story terribly disorganized and subject to rewrites."

Sachar believes that rewrites are a necessary part of the writing process. Unlike many writers, he doesn't like to start with an outline; instead, he begins each book by writing a disorganized first draft. Then he can improve the story by rewriting, because he already knows who the main characters will be and how the plot will develop. He usually rewrites each book six or seven times before it is finished. He compares the process of writing and rewriting books to making a sculpture. "If I was going to make a statue of you in clay, I'd start out with a lump of clay. Then I'd make legs, arms, and a round little ball for your head," he told a group of students. "That's like the first draft. Then I'd go back to it. More and more it would begin to look like you."

Sachar writes for a few hours each morning, alone in his house. He never tells anyone about a story he is working on until it is done. "By working on a book for a year without talking about it," he explained, "the story keeps building inside, until it's bursting to be told and the words come pouring out when I sit down to write."

Over the years, Sachar has made his reputation as a writer of humorous realistic fiction for children and middle-school readers. His stories have special meaning for young audiences because many of his characters are outcasts who learn about themselves through their experiences and are eventually accepted by others. "Writing for elementary school students, I've tried to recall what it felt like for me to be that age," Sachar noted.

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"Despite the notion that times have changed, I think that kids in grade school are basically the same as they were when I was young."

Reviewers have praised Sachar's stories for helping children think about their own behavior and the way they treat others. But he claims that he does not intentionally put morals into his books. "The best morals kids get out of any book is just the capacity to empathize with other people, to care about the other characters and their feelings," he noted. "You don't have to set out to write a preachy book to do that. You just make it a fun book with characters they care about, and they will become better people as a result."

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

Sachar met his wife through a group of young readers in Plano, Texas. They liked his books and invited him to visit their school and meet their unmarried teacher. When he made his visit, however, Sachar found that he liked the school counselor, Carla Askew, better than the teacher. The two were married on May 26, 1985.

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Sachar and his wife moved to San Francisco after their wedding, where he wrote books and she taught school for several years. In 1991, they moved to Austin, Texas, to be closer to her family. They have one daughter, Sherre, who is now a teenager. After Sachar won the Newbery Medal, Sherre and her mother, Carla, wrote an article for *Horn Book* magazine in July 1999. They revealed just what Sachar is like at home, disclosing little tidbits like the fact that he has a pinball machine in his home office that he sometimes plays when he should be busy writing.

HOBBIES AND OTHER INTERESTS

In his spare time, Sachar enjoys playing the card game bridge and belongs to a bridge club near his home in Austin. His other hobbies include playing chess, reading, skiing, playing the guitar, and walking his dogs.

SELECTED WRITINGS

Johnny's in the Basement, 1981
Someday Angeline, 1983
There's a Boy in the Girls' Bathroom, 1987
Sixth Grade Secrets, 1987
The Boy Who Lost His Face, 1989
Dogs Don't Tell Jokes, 1991
Monkey Soup, 1992
Holes, 1998

Wayside School Series

Sideways Stories from Wayside School, 1978
Wayside School Is Falling Down, 1989
Sideways Arithmetic from Wayside School, 1989
Wayside School Gets a Little Stranger, 1995

Marvin Redpost Series

Marvin Redpost: Kidnapped at Birth? 1992
Marvin Redpost: Why Pick on Me? 1993
Marvin Redpost: Is He a Girl? 1993
Marvin Redpost: Alone in His Teacher's House, 1994
Marvin Redpost: Class President, 1998
Marvin Redpost: A Flying Birthday Cake? 1999

HONORS AND AWARDS

Ethical Culture School Book Award: 1978, for *Sideways Stories from Wayside School*
Children's Choice Award (International Reading Association and the Children's Book Council): 1979, for *Sideways Stories from Wayside School*
Parents' Choice Award: 1987, for *There's a Boy in the Girls' Bathroom*
National Book Award for Young People's Literature: 1998, for *Holes*
Best Book for Young Adults (*New York Times*): 1998, for *Holes*
Best Book for Young Adults (*School Library Journal*): 1998, for *Holes*
Best Book for Young Adults (*Publishers Weekly*): 1998, for *Holes*
Christopher Medal: 1999, for *Holes*
Newbery Medal (American Library Association): 1999, for *Holes*

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FURTHER READING

Books

Holtze, Sally Holmes, ed. *Seventh Book of Junior Authors and Illustrators,* 1996
McElmeel, Sharron L. *One Hundred Most Popular Children's Authors,* 1999
Something about the Author, Vol. 63, 1991
Twentieth-Century Children's Writers, 1995

Periodicals

Bangor (Maine) Daily News, May 17, 1999
Chattanooga (Tennessee) Times and Free Press, July 4, 1999, p.D8
Dallas Morning News, Mar. 14, 1999, p.A47
Horn Book, Sep.-Oct. 1998, p.593; July 1999, pp.410 and 418
Houston Chronicle, Dec. 15, 1998, p.1; Feb. 2, 1999, p.1
Knoxville (Tennessee) News-Sentinel, Apr. 29, 1999, p.B1
New York Times, Feb. 2, 1999, p.B3
Oregonian, Mar. 12, 1999, p.E1
Seattle Times, Apr. 20, 1991, p.C2
Tacoma (Washington) News Tribune, Apr. 30, 1995, p.SL17
U.S. News and World Report, Feb. 15, 1999, p.12

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New York, NY 10016

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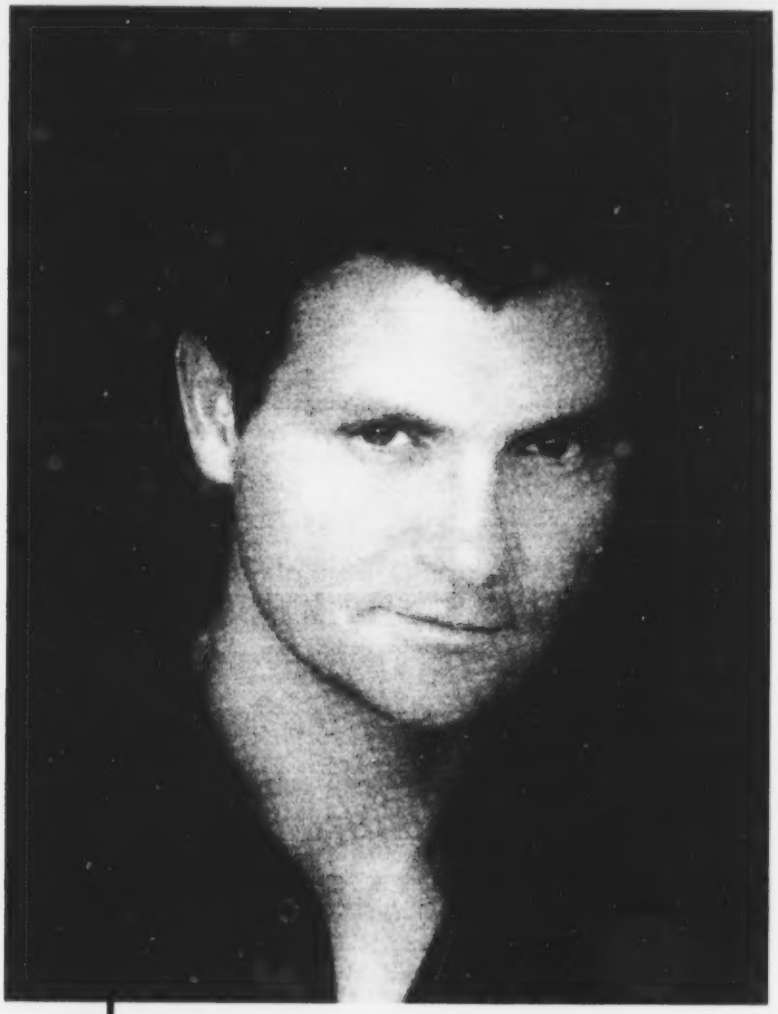

Kevin Williamson 1965-

American Screenwriter, Producer, and Director
Writer of the Hit Movies *Scream, Scream 2,* and *I Know What You Did Last Summer*
Creator of the Popular TV Series "Dawson's Creek"

BIRTH

Kevin Williamson was born on March 14, 1965, in New Bern, North Carolina. His father, Wade, is a commercial fisherman with a 105-foot shrimp boat, and his mother, Faye, is a homemaker. He has one older brother, John.

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YOUTH

Williamson was raised in the small coastal town of Oriental, North Carolina. "It was a little fishing village . . . that really had a place called Dawson's Creek, out by the water. It was our high school hangout, where kids would go to party on the weekend and skinny dip and make out. The town had one stoplight, one gas station, and two restaurants." His father's shrimp and scallop business fell upon hard times when he was a boy, so both he and his brother worked at odd jobs to help the family make ends meet. Williamson was one of the main lawn mowers and babysitters in his neighborhood for several years. As a teenager, he worked as a waiter in the town's restaurants and as a gas station attendant.

Williamson claims that he got his sense of humor from his father and his gift for storytelling from his mother. "She could take any circumstance and make a great tale out of it," he noted. His mother always thought he would be a writer. To encourage this career path, she bought him a typewriter for Christmas when he was 10. Unfortunately, someone stole the wrapped package out of the back of her car. His parents had to borrow money in order to buy another one.

"I grew up when slasher movies were popular and that's when I started to gain a love of film. Those were the movies I watched and I watched a lot of them. I was also a big fan of all the John Hughes movies like **The Breakfast Club, Pretty in Pink,** *and* **Sixteen Candles.** *Those were my influences so I tried to merge the two genres."*

Growing up, Williamson's biggest treat was going to the movies every Saturday. In fact, he has said that seeing the horror movie *Halloween* for the first time marked a major turning point in his life. "I grew up when slasher movies were popular and that's when I started to gain a love of film," he explained. "Those were the movies I watched and I watched a lot of them. I was also a big fan of all the John Hughes movies like *The Breakfast Club, Pretty in Pink,* and *Sixteen Candles.* Those were my influences so I tried to merge the two genres."

Another of Williamson's favorite movies as a kid was *Jaws,* directed by his idol Steven Spielberg. "I sat through that movie I can't tell you how many times. I knew the mechanics of Bruce the shark inside and out,"

"I sat through [Jaws] *I can't tell you how many times. I knew the mechanics of Bruce the shark inside and out. [In the theater], I sat in the front row and my neck hurt so much that I kept turning my head around, and what I saw was really amazing. A theater full of people, totally involved, screaming in terror. I knew it was what I wanted to do with my life."*

Williamson recalled. "[In the theater], I sat in the front row and my neck hurt so much that I kept turning my head around, and what I saw was really amazing. A theater full of people, totally involved, screaming in terror. I knew it was what I wanted to do with my life."

In 1975, Williamson had an experience that made the movie seem even more real to him. He went out on his father's boat with a group of men, including his uncle Phil, who was a teenager at the time. The men threw squid and fish guts overboard and attracted a teeming school of sharks. "I was too scared to come to the edge of the boat and look over the rail because there were tons of sharks down there," Williamson remembered. But then his uncle "grabbed me by the ankles and dipped me in the water. And when a shark would come to the surface, he would pick me up. I was so scared I couldn't scream."

Williamson began working toward his dream of becoming a filmmaker at an early age. "At age 12, I talked our town librarian into ordering a subscription to weekly *Variety*," he recalled. "At 13, I was making my own movies with an editing slicer I got out of the Sears catalog." One of his first efforts was a short film called *White as a Ghost*, which starred his neighbor in dual roles as the murderer and the victim.

EDUCATION

Williamson attended the public schools near his home in rural North Carolina. He admits that he was a bit of a troublemaker in school. "Like in school," he says, "when we had to write sentences on the blackboard and then diagram them, I would write stuff like, 'The baby on the meat hook jerked.'" He struggled to fit in as a student at Pamlico County High School, moving from one group of friends to another. "I hung out with the smokers. I hung out with the in-crowd. I hung out with the A students," he noted. "I am really glad I did because now I have such a huge filing cabinet of information."

One of the most difficult things about high school for Williamson was having a teacher who discouraged him from writing. "I was terrible with English. I never could get right the difference between 'lie' and 'lay,'" he admitted. "My teacher said my grammar was terrible and I was just a kid from the sticks who'd never be a writer. She paralyzed me for a while." Considering how mean she was, it's amazing that Williamson ever wrote another word. "She had it out for me from day one. She knew that I wanted to be a writer, that I wanted to be a storyteller, and she did everything she could to cripple that. Our final assignment was to write a short story and she stopped me halfway through my reading it to the class and said: 'That's disgusting. Your voice shouldn't be heard. Give up any hope of being a writer.' I believed her for ten years." But he still wrote reviews for the school newspaper and plays for the drama club. After graduating from high school in 1983, Williamson went on to study theater and film at East Carolina University in Greenville, North Carolina. He earned a bachelor's degree in 1987.

FIRST JOBS

Shortly after he graduated from college, Williamson moved to New York City with hopes of becoming an actor. During his four years there, he managed to land a part as an extra on the soap opera "Another World." But he spent most of his time working odd jobs, including stints as a waiter, dog walker, house sitter, and temporary office worker. He finally decided that acting was not for him and returned home to North Carolina. "Everyone looked at me and thought: 'He's a failure. Serves him right for trying to be so smart and going to New York,'" he recalled. "I reacted by going to Hollywood."

Williamson moved to Los Angeles in 1991 and soon got a job as an assistant to a music video director. One of his projects was producing the video for "Mama Said Knock You Out" by the rapper LL Cool J. But Williamson

"[One teacher] had it out for me from day one. She knew that I wanted to be a writer, that I wanted to be a storyteller, and she did everything she could to cripple that. Our final assignment was to write a short story and she stopped me halfway through my reading it to the class and said: 'That's disgusting. Your voice shouldn't be heard. Give up any hope of being a writer.' I believed her for ten years."

continued to be dissatisfied with his career. In 1994, he took a class in screenwriting at an extension campus of the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). By the time he completed the course, he had decided to try his hand as a screenwriter. Upon hearing the news, his mother said, "So you finally got the hint from when I gave you the typewriter when you were 10."

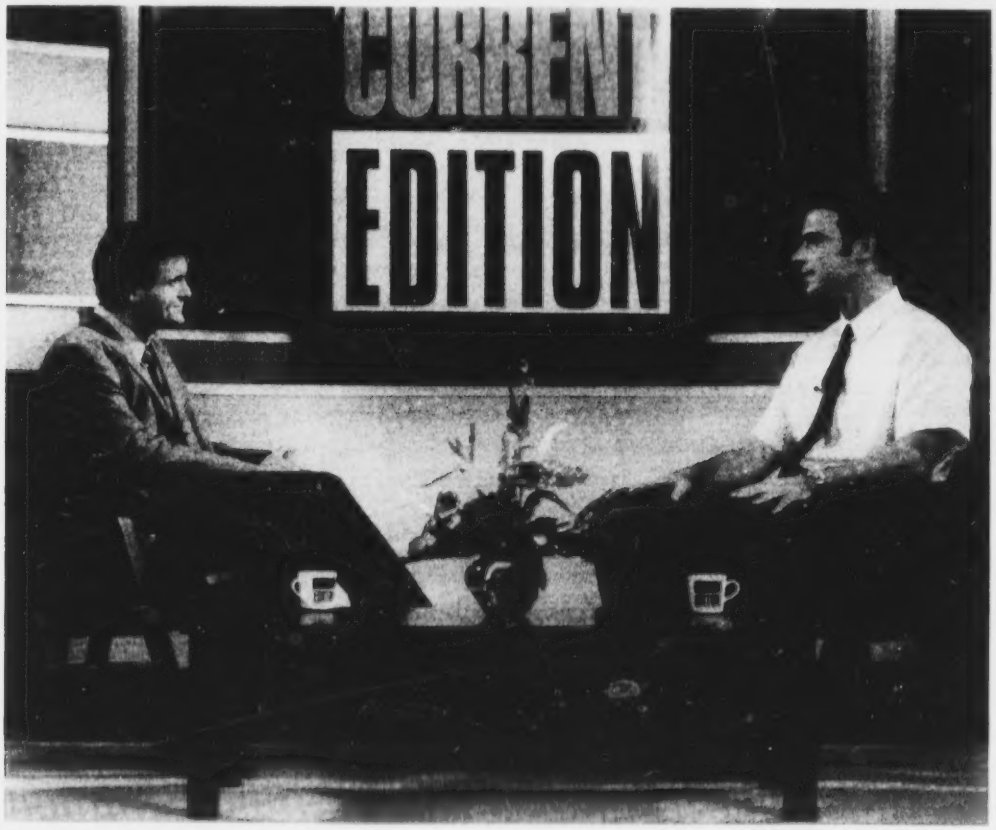
CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

Williamson experienced success as a screenwriter almost immediately. In 1994 he sold a screenplay that he had written for his class, called "Killing Mrs. Tingle," for over $100,000. This is the screenplay for the 1999 movie *Teaching Mrs. Tingle*. He immediately went out and got his own apartment and bought a new car. But the production company that had bought his screenplay never turned it into a movie, and he did not manage to sell any of his later efforts. He soon began running out of money. "I had paid off all my college loans but I was broke. All my bills were due. They were coming to get my car," he recalled. "The phone was about to be turned off. I didn't have enough money to buy a new ink cartridge for my printer."

Desperate to write something that would sell, Williamson accepted an offer to spend a long weekend alone at a friend's condominium in Palm Springs. It was there that he got the idea for what turned out to be the highest-grossing horror movie of all time. "I was trying to come up with something different. Something that hadn't been done before. Then I hit on the idea of a scary movie about a bunch of people who know everything about scary movies," Williamson related. He thought to himself, "What if I wrote a story about all these kids who grew up next to a Blockbuster and know Freddy [Krueger of *Nightmare on Elm Street*] and Michael [Myers of *Halloween*] and Jason [of *Friday the 13th*] like the back of their hand. What would they do if they got into a real situation with a guy with a knife?"

Scream

Williamson wrote the screenplay for *Scream* over the course of three days. He hoped to sell it for enough money to pay off his bills. But to his surprise, the screenplay ended up causing a bidding war among several major studios. Finally Williamson sold the rights to *Scream* to Wes Craven, the director of *Nightmare on Elm Street* and many other scary movies, for $500,000. "I was worried that Wes would change the whole thing and what got on screen wouldn't be mine," Williamson remembered. "A big



Kevin Williamson, left, with Liev Schreiber, right, in a scene from Scream 2

packet of papers came back from Wes, and I feared the worst. When I looked inside, I found that all he had done was grammatical corrections. He hadn't changed the script at all. Wes was once a college English professor, and he said I really needed to learn how to spell."

Scream was a parody of horror movies that starred Neve Campbell, Courteney Cox, Drew Barrymore, David Arquette, and Skeet Ulrich. It tracks a series of brutal murders in the small town of Woodsboro, California. A group of high school students, including Sidney Prescott (Campbell), is being terrorized by a knife-wielding killer in a cape and Halloween mask. *Scream* was different from many earlier horror movies: it left the audience alternately cringing with terror and laughing at the funny one-liners. A clever, ironic, and unsettling send-up of old slasher films, it openly mocked the conventions of the genre. For example, one scene in the film shows Neve Campbell alone in a house. A strange, menacing man calls her on the phone and asks her to name her favorite scary movie. "They're all the same," she replies. "Some stupid killer stalking some big-breasted girl who can't act who's always running up the stairs

when she should be going out the front door. It's insulting." Of course, when it becomes clear that the man on the phone is a knife-wielding killer and is right outside, she runs up the stairs. In another scene, several characters recite the rules of survival for scary movies—which include never saying "I'll be right back"—and then proceed to break them.

Williamson says that when he sold the rights to Scream *to Wes Craven, the director of* Nightmare on Elm Street *and many other scary movies, "I was worried that Wes would change the whole thing and what got on screen wouldn't be mine. A big packet of papers came back from Wes, and I feared the worst. When I looked inside, I found that all he had done was grammatical corrections. He hadn't changed the script at all. Wes was once a college English professor, and he said I really needed to learn how to spell."*

Craven shot *Scream* on a relatively modest budget of $15 million. It became a huge hit upon its release in 1996 and made over $100 million at the box office. Teenagers loved *Scream* because it cleverly made fun of some of the slasher movies that had come before it. Thanks to Williamson's fresh, hip approach, *Scream* ended up revitalizing the horror movie genre. Williamson has been credited with bringing the horror genre up to date, with witty dialogue, cute guys, and strong female characters. "For a generation steeped in pop culture, *Scream* was a film swimming in subtext—a movie that wittily commented on horror-movie conventions as its own bloody tale was playing out," critic Patrick Goldstein wrote in the *Los Angeles Times*. "The average 15-year-old girl who went to see the first *Halloween* movie back in 1978 is by no means coming from the same place that the average 15-year-old girl is who saw *Scream* last year. Not only are teenagers a lot more self-aware but now there's cable and VCRs, and kids know these kinds of movies backwards and forwards," Williamson explained. "By acknowledging that they are in on it, that they're too smart to get sucked in, that somehow lets us take the genre back to square one, when its power wasn't diluted by everything that's come before. All of a sudden, it's pumped up and fresh. Basically, we could scare them all over again as if it were the first time."

I Know What You Did Last Summer

Williamson's success as a screenwriter continued in 1997 with another horror movie aimed at teenagers, *I Know What You Did Last Summer*. He adapted the story from a popular young adult novel by writer Lois Duncan. It tells the story of a group of four teenagers played by Sarah Michelle Gellar, Jennifer Love Hewitt, Ryan Philippe, and Freddie Prinze, Jr. Driving home from a party one night, they take a curve in the road too fast and hit a pedestrian. Frightened about what the accident might mean to their future plans, they dump the body in the ocean and agree never to speak of it again. But a year later, the guilt is beginning to take a toll on them. Then they get a note from someone who says, "I know what you did last summer," and the fun begins. This suspenseful thriller became a big hit with teenage fans.

"The thing I like about [*I Know What You Did Last Summer*] is that here are four bright, wonderful kids with an incredible future, but in a way they are stock characters," Williamson noted. "The way I tried to shake things up was that these stock characters make a decision to preserve their future that in the process actually destroys their future. The beauty queen is now a Prozac-popping, frizzed-out has-been, the jock has become suicidal, and the brain is flunking out. So it really became about how they keep a secret and how deadly secrets are and how they can ultimately kill you."

Scream 2

Also in 1997, Williamson wrote the screenplay and acted as executive producer for *Scream 2*. This sequel starred Campbell, Cox, Gellar, Arquette, Jada Pinkett, Rebecca Gayheart, Tori Spelling, Heather Graham, and even Williamson, who also had a small part in it. In this film, he used a movie-within-a-movie to make fun of the original *Scream* as well as other horror movies. The film picks up the story two years after the Woodsboro murders. *Scream 2* starts out with a movie-within-a-movie. The opening scene takes place at a movie theater, where students have come to see "Stab," a movie made from the best-selling book by journalist Gale Weathers (Cox) on the Woodsboro killings. The mask-wearing murderer who first stalked Sidney in *Scream* shows up at the movie where "Stab" is being screened. *Scream 2* is a spoof on sequels as well as on horror movies in general. The opening scene satirizes the original *Scream* while at the same time setting the mood for the murders that follow. The formula was successful again: like its predecessor, *Scream 2* became a huge hit with teen fans and earned another $100 million at the box office.

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"Dawson's Creek"

In 1998, Williamson moved away from horror movies to create the teen drama "Dawson's Creek" for the WB television network. It follows the life of an idealistic, young, aspiring filmmaker, Dawson Leery (played by James Van Der Beek), in a small coastal town similar to the one where Williamson lived as a boy. Dawson's best friends are Joey Potter (played by Katie Holmes), a girl-next-door-type who begins to experience romantic feelings towards him, and Pacey Witter (played by Joshua Jackson), a good-hearted guy who works at the video store with him after school. Dawson's world becomes more complicated with the arrival of Jennifer Lindley (played by Michelle Williams), a beautiful girl with a mysterious past.

Williamson took many aspects of "Dawson's Creek" from his own teen years. "'Dawson's Creek' has always been very personal and autobiographical; I live and breathe in all the characters," he noted. "Dawson represents the filmmaker and dreamer, the Spielberg-obsessed idealist who views the world optimistically; Joey represents more of the cynical, angry side as well as my roots and upbringing. Pacey represents the joker in me; and Jen, the rebel."

"Dawson's Creek" proved to be tremendously popular with teen audiences. Likewise, many television critics praised the show as a sensitive and intelligent coming-of-age story. Writing in the *Chicago Tribune,* Allan Johnson called the show "an impressive, richly written and compelling drama that will give Fox's 'Party of Five' a run for its money in the young-people-with-angst department."

The teenaged characters in "Dawson's Creek"—like those in Williamson's earlier work—tend to be highly self-aware and express themselves intelligently. Some critics have called the dialogue unrealistic, claiming that teenagers do not really talk that way. But Williamson defended the show. "I don't think what we're doing is racy or edgy," he stated. "This is just the way kids talk. And that's important to me. I wrote this show because I'm sick of Hollywood treating young people like they're a bunch of idiots. I want to give kids teens who are smart, who have a good sense of humor, and who are in on the joke. Because I believe that's the reality, but we just don't see it often enough."

In addition, some critics have complained that the sexual content in "Dawson's Creek" is too mature for TV. For example, during the first season Pacey became involved in an affair with one of his teachers. Again, Williamson defended his creation. "To me, this is an innocent show," he

The cast of "Dawson's Creek"

noted. "It's about that first kiss, about sweaty palms, about holding hands." Williamson acted as the executive producer of "Dawson's Creek" for its first two seasons, and also wrote the scripts for many of the early episodes. In 1999, however, he began to limit his role on the series, but he still serves as executive producer.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Marisa Coughlan, center, with director Kevin Williamson, right, on the set of Teaching Mrs. Tingle

Recent Projects

Williamson remained active in the movies during the time that he was creating "Dawson's Creek." In 1998, he worked on the script and became the executive producer of *Halloween H2O,* the 20th anniversary installment of the classic horror movie *Halloween.* He was thrilled that Jamie Lee Curtis, who starred in the first Halloween movie, agreed to play a major role in the film. Also in 1998, Williamson adapted the screenplay for a science-fiction thriller called *The Faculty.* In this movie, aliens take over the bodies of teachers at a suburban high school, and a group of students becomes the only hope for stopping them.

In 1999, Williamson made his debut as a film director with *Teaching Mrs. Tingle.* Interestingly, this movie was based on the screenplay "Killing Mrs. Tingle" that he had sold in his early days in Hollywood; the success of his later films convinced a different studio to buy the screenplay and begin work on the project. The name of the film was changed, though, out of respect in the aftermath of the terrible tragedy at Columbine High School in Colorado The story is a black comedy about a high school senior, played by Katie Holmes, who's a straight-A student who always does the right thing. Her only way to escape from her small town is to win the college scholarship that is granted each year to the school valedictorian, its top

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graduating senior. All she needs is an A in her history class. And all that stands in her way is her history teacher, Mrs. Tingle, who has been terrorizing students for 20 years. Williamson has said that it reflects his own experience in high school with a discouraging teacher. "I loved the script," said Holmes. "I couldn't put it down. It's just so clever in depicting how many ways someone can try to destroy the human spirit—and how some people fight back. Kevin really remembers how it was to be in high school, to have a teacher like Mrs. Tingle. It's easy to relate to—although it is heightened to the point of being comedy—and that makes it a lot of fun." Released in 1999, *Teaching Mrs. Tingle* was only moderately successful at the box office.

Also in 1999, Williamson began writing and producing a new TV series called "Wasteland" for the ABC network. The show follows the adventures of six young college graduates in Los Angeles. They're just learning to cope with life after college as they deal with the issues of career, friendship, and romance. It was based on Williamson's struggles to make it as an actor and screenwriter in New York and Hollywood. Here's how he describes the show. "Take all your 'Dawson's Creek' characters, age them by ten years, throw in a lot of sex and nudity, and put it on ABC at ten o'clock. Throw them in LA and make them wandering, aimless people. It's that moment when you get out of college; some break out, some of them are nearly falling apart, and some are stuck in the middle without a clue."

> *"The reason Williamson's been able to strike such a nerve with his young core audience is that instead of talking down to them, he compliments them. Williamson shows teens a reflection of how they want to be seen: witty, urbane, and always armed with a perfectly barbed, sarcastic comment."—Chris Nashawaty,* **Entertainment Weekly**

Williamson has also been hard at work on the screenplay for *Scream 3*, which is due to be released in late 1999. When it is completed, he has said that he plans to devote his talents to action movies and romantic comedies. "I don't know how many more horror stories I can come up with. And so I'm just trying to tell stories that are inside me—'Dawson's Creek' and 'Wasteland' and romantic comedies—and hopefully another horror movie will come back around one day. But I just want to work. . . . I just love writing. I try to write sophisticated, smart, clever people. That's

my goal as a writer, so no one thinks I'm that degenerate ignorant backwoods hillbilly whose voice shouldn't be heard."

The Nature of His Success

Today, Williamson is known for his connection with teen audiences and his unique insights into what will best entertain them. "The reason Williamson's been able to strike such a nerve with his young core audience is that instead of talking down to them, he compliments them. Williamson shows teens a reflection of how they want to be seen: witty, urbane, and always armed with a perfectly barbed, sarcastic comment," Chris Nashawaty explained in *Entertainment Weekly*. "Williamson's magic touch seems to be his ability to speak to teenagers on their level without being perceived as an adult who's pandering to them in order to cash in," Kenneth M. Chanko added in the *Boston Globe*.

"Williamson's magic touch seems to be his ability to speak to teenagers on their level without being perceived as an adult who's pandering to them in order to cash in."
—Kenneth M. Chanko,
Boston Globe

Williamson's rapid rise to success in Hollywood has been phenomenal. The first four movies he became involved with grossed more than $500 million at the box office. His share of the profits could easily amount to more than $100 million. But he refuses to take time off in order to enjoy his success. "I sort of feel like I've been unemployed for so long with all these stories to tell and now someone wants to hear all of them," he explained. "I feel like it's all going to end one day so I better take advantage of it while I can, because today's hot flavor might be gone tomorrow."

HOME AND FAMILY

Williamson lives alone in what he calls "the little house that *Scream* built" on the outskirts of Beverly Hills, California. In early 1999, he revealed that he is a homosexual. He had told his family and friends that he is gay many years earlier, when he was in his 20s. But he says that his sexual orientation did not become public knowledge because no one ever asked him about it. "I wanted to speak through my work," he explained. "I don't see where I serve myself, or anyone else, to scream at the top of my lungs that I'm gay."

Williamson remains close to his family. In fact, he used some of his new-found wealth to buy his parents a new home in North Carolina.

HOBBIES AND OTHER INTERESTS

Williamson describes himself as a "workaholic" and admits that he has few interests outside of his writing and the movie business. "If I sleep a couple of hours a night, I'm missing out on something," he stated. "Life is work, and I love it." To keep himself going through late nights and early mornings, he enjoys munching on Jelly Belly candies.

WILLIAMSON'S FAVORITE SCARY MOVIES

1. *Halloween,* 1978
2. *Don't Look Now,* 1973
3. *The Silence of the Lambs,* 1991
4. *The Stepfather,* 1987
5. *Mute Witness,* 1995

SELECTED WRITINGS

Screenplays

Scream, 1996
I Know What You Did Last Summer, 1997
Scream 2, 1997
"Dawson's Creek," 1998-99 (TV series)
Halloween H2O, 1998
The Faculty, 1998
Teaching Mrs. Tingle, 1999
"Wasteland," 1999- (TV series)

HONORS AND AWARDS

Saturn Award (Academy of Science Fiction, Horror, and Fantasy Films): 1997, for *Scream*

FURTHER READING

Periodicals

Boston Globe, Nov. 30, 1997, p.N1
Chicago Tribune, Jan. 20, 1998, Tempo, p.1; Jan. 25, 1998, TV Week, p.5
Entertainment Weekly, Dec. 26, 1997, p.38

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New York Times, Dec. 26, 1997, p.E21; Jan. 18, 1998, p.B35
Newsweek, Nov. 3, 1997, p.84; Jan. 19, 1998, p.68; Aug. 23, 1999, p.63
San Francisco Chronicle, Dec. 13, 1997, p.C1
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TV Guide, Jan. 10, 1998, p.30; Mar. 7, 1998, p.24
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Writer's Digest, Nov. 1997, p.55

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Kevin Williamson/Photos: Kimberly Wright (*Scream 2*); Bruce Birmelin (*Teaching Mrs. Tingle*).

How to Use the Cumulative Index

Our indexes have a new look. In an effort to make our indexes easier to use, we've combined the Name and General Index into a new, cumulative General Index. This single ready-reference resource covers all the volumes in *Biography Today,* both the general series and the special subject series. The new General Index contains complete listings of all individuals who have appeared in *Biography Today* since the series began. Their names appear in bold-faced type, followed by the issue in which they appear. The General Index also includes references for the occupations, nationalities, and ethnic and minority origins of individuals profiled in *Biography Today*.

We have also made some changes to our specialty indexes, the Places of Birth Index and the Birthday Index. To consolidate and to save space, the Places of Birth Index and the Birthday Index will no longer appear in the January and April issues of the softbound subscription series. But these indexes can still be found in the September issue of the softbound subscription series, in the hardbound Annual Cumulation at the end of each year, and in each volume of the special subject series.

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Updated information on selected individuals appears in the Appendix at the end of the *Biography Today* Annual Cumulation. In the index, the original entry is listed first, followed by any updates.

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1 Salinger, J.D.	1919
2 Asimov, Isaac	1920
4 Naylor, Phyllis Reynolds	1933
Shula, Don	1930
7 Hurston, Zora Neale	?1891
Rodriguez, Eloy	1947
8 Hawking, Stephen W.	1942
9 Menchu, Rigoberta	1959
Nixon, Richard	1913
12 Limbaugh, Rush	1951
14 Lucid, Shannon	1943
15 Werbach, Adam	1973
16 Fossey, Dian	1932
17 Carrey, Jim	1962
Cormier, Robert	1925
Jones, James Earl	1931
Lewis, Shari	?1934
18 Ali, Muhammad	1942
Messier, Mark	1961
19 Askins, Renee	1959
Johnson, John	1918
21 Domingo, Placido	1941
Nicklaus, Jack	1940
Olajuwon, Hakeem	1963
22 Chavis, Benjamin	1948
23 Thiessen, Tiffani-Amber	1974
25 Alley, Kirstie	1955
26 Siskel, Gene	1946
28 Gretzky, Wayne	1961
29 Abbey, Edward	1927
Gilbert, Sara	1975
Hasek, Dominik	1965
Peet, Bill	1915
Winfrey, Oprah	1954
30 Alexander, Lloyd	1924
31 Robinson, Jackie	1919
Ryan, Nolan	1947

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1 Spinelli, Jerry	1941
Yeltsin, Boris	1931
3 Nixon, Joan Lowery	1927
Rockwell, Norman	1894
4 Parks, Rosa	1913
5 Aaron, Hank	1934
6 Leakey, Mary	1913
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Zmeskal, Kim	1976
7 Brooks, Garth	1962
Wang, An	1920
Wilder, Laura Ingalls	1867
8 Grisham, John	1955
9 Love, Susan	1948
10 Konigsburg, E.L.	1930
Norman, Greg	1955
11 Aniston, Jennifer	1969
Brandy	1979
12 Blume, Judy	1938
Kurzweil, Raymond	1948
15 Groening, Matt	1954
Van Dyken, Amy	1973
17 Anderson, Marian	1897
Hargreaves, Alison	1962
Jordan, Michael	1963
18 Morrison, Toni	1931
20 Adams, Ansel	1902
Barkley, Charles	1963
Cobain, Kurt	1967
Crawford, Cindy	1966
Hernandez, Livan	1975
21 Carpenter, Mary Chapin	1958
Jordan, Barbara	1936
Mugabe, Robert	1924
24 Jobs, Steven	1955
Vernon, Mike	1963
Whitestone, Heather	1973
25 Voigt, Cynthia	1942
27 Clinton, Chelsea	1980
28 Andretti, Mario	1940
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1 Ellison, Ralph Waldo	1914
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Rabin, Yitzhak	1922
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2	Gorbachev, Mikhail	1931
	Satcher, David	1941
	Seuss, Dr.	1904
3	Hooper, Geoff	1979
	Joyner-Kersee, Jackie	1962
	MacLachlan, Patricia	1938
4	Morgan, Garrett	1877
5	Margulis, Lynn	1938
6	Ashley, Maurice	1966
7	McCarty, Oseola	1908
10	Guy, Jasmine	1964
	Miller, Shannon	1977
12	Hamilton, Virginia	1936
13	Van Meter, Vicki	1982
14	Hanson, Taylor	1983
	Williamson, Kevin	1965
15	Ginsburg, Ruth Bader	1933
16	O'Neal, Shaquille	1972
17	Hamm, Mia	1972
	Nureyev, Rudolf	1938
18	Blair, Bonnie	1964
	de Klerk, F.W.	1936
	Queen Latifah	1970
19	Blanchard, Rachel	1976
20	Lee, Spike	1957
	Lowry, Lois	1937
	Sachar, Louis	1954
21	Gilbert, Walter	1932
	O'Donnell, Rosie	1962
22	Shatner, William	1931
25	Lovell, Jim	1928
	Steinem, Gloria	1934
	Swoopes, Sheryl	1971
26	Allen, Marcus	1960
	Erdös, Paul	1913
	O'Connor, Sandra Day	1930
	Stockton, John	1962
27	Carey, Mariah	1970
28	James, Cheryl	
	McEntire, Reba	1955
30	Dion, Celine	1968
	Hammer	1933
31	Chavez, Cesar	1927
	Gore, Al	1948
	Howe, Gordie	1928

April		Year
1	Maathai, Wangari	1940
2	Carvey, Dana	1955
3	Garth, Jennie	1972
	Goodall, Jane	1934
	Street, Picabo	1971
4	Angelou, Maya	1928
5	Powell, Colin	1937
6	Watson, James D.	1928
7	Dougals, Marjory Stoneman	1890
8	Annan, Kofi	1938
10	Madden, John	1936
12	Cleary, Beverly	1916
	Danes, Claire	1979
	Doherty, Shannen	1971
	Letterman, David	1947
	Soto, Gary	1952
13	Brandis, Jonathan	1976
	Henry, Marguerite	1902
14	Gellar, Sarah Michelle	1977
	Maddux, Greg	1966
	Rose, Pete	1941
16	Abdul-Jabbar, Kareem	1947
	Selena	1971
	Williams, Garth	1912
17	Champagne, Larry III	1985
18	Hart, Melissa Joan	1976
20	Brundtland, Gro Harlem	1939
22	Levi-Montalcini, Rita	1909
	Oppenheimer, J. Robert	1904
25	Fitzgerald, Ella	1917
26	Pei, I.M.	1917
27	Wilson, August	1945
28	Baker, James	1930
	Duncan, Lois	1934
	Hussein, Saddam	1937
	Kaunda, Kenneth	1924
	Leno, Jay	1950
29	Agassi, Andre	1970
	Seinfeld, Jerry	1954

May		Year
2	Spock, Benjamin	1903
5	Lionni, Leo	1910
	Maxwell, Jody-Anne	1986
7	Land, Edwin	1909
9	Bergen, Candice	1946
	Yzerman, Steve	1965
10	Cooney, Caroline B.	1947
	Curtis, Christopher Paul	1953
	Jamison, Judith	1944
11	Farrakhan, Louis	1933
13	Pascal, Francine	1938
	Rodman, Dennis	1961

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14	Lucas, George	1944
	Smith, Emmitt	1969
15	Albright, Madeleine	1937
	Johns, Jasper	1930
	Zindel, Paul	1936
17	Paulsen, Gary	1939
18	John Paul II	1920
19	Brody, Jane	1941
	Hansberry, Lorraine	1930
21	Robinson, Mary	1944
23	Bardeen, John	1908
	Jewel	1974
	O'Dell, Scott	1898
24	Dumars, Joe	1963
26	Hill, Lauryn	1975
	Ride, Sally	1951
27	Carson, Rachel	1907
	Kerr, M.E.	1927
28	Johnston, Lynn	1947
	Shabazz, Betty	1936
30	Cohen, Adam Ezra	1979

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1	Lalas, Alexi	1970
	Morissette, Alanis	1974
4	Kistler, Darci	1964
5	Scarry, Richard	1919
6	Rylant, Cynthia	1954
7	Brooks, Gwendolyn	1917
	Oleynik, Larisa	1981
8	Bush, Barbara	1925
	Edelman, Marian Wright	1939
	Wayans, Keenen Ivory	1958
	Wright, Frank Lloyd	1869
9	Portman, Natalie	1981
10	Frank, Anne	1929
	Lipinski, Tara	1982
	Sendak, Maurice	1928
11	Cousteau, Jacques	1910
	Montana, Joe	1956
12	Bush, George	1924
13	Allen, Tim	1953
	Alvarez, Luis W.	1911
	Christo	1935
14	Bourke-White, Margaret	1904
	Graf, Steffi	1969
	Summitt, Pat	1952
	Yep, Laurence	1948
15	Horner, Jack	1946
	Jacques, Brian	1939
16	McClintock, Barbara	1902
	Shakur, Tupac	1971
17	Gingrich, Newt	1943
	Jansen, Dan	1965
	Williams, Venus	1980
18	Johnson, Angela	1961
	Morris, Nathan	1971
	Van Allsburg, Chris	1949
19	Abdul, Paula	1962
	Aung San Suu Kyi	1945
20	Goodman, John	1952
21	Bhutto, Benazir	1953
	Breathed, Berke	1957
22	Bradley, Ed	1941
23	Rudolph, Wilma	1940
	Thomas, Clarence	1948
25	Carle, Eric	1929
	Gibbs, Lois	1951
26	Harris, Bernard	1956
	LeMond, Greg	1961
27	Babbitt, Bruce	1938
	Perot, H. Ross	1930
28	Elway, John	1960

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1	Brower, David	1912
	Calderone, Mary S.	1904
	Diana, Princess of Wales	1961
	Duke, David	1950
	Lewis, Carl	1961
	McCully, Emily Arnold	1939
2	Bethe, Hans A.	1906
	George, Jean Craighead	1919
	Marshall, Thurgood	1908
	Petty, Richard	1937
	Thomas, Dave	1932
5	Watterson, Bill	1958
6	Dalai Lama	1935
	Dumitriu, Ioana	1976
7	Chagall, Marc	1887
	Heinlein, Robert	1907
	Kwan, Michelle	1980
	Stachowski, Richie	1985
8	Hardaway, Anfernee "Penny"	1971
	Sealfon, Rebecca	1983
9	Farmer, Nancy	1941
	Hanks, Tom	1956
	Hassan II	1929
	Krim, Mathilde	1926
	Sacks, Oliver	1933

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10	Ashe, Arthur	1943
	Boulmerka, Hassiba	1969
11	Cisneros, Henry	1947
	White, E.B.	1899
12	Cosby, Bill	1937
	Yamaguchi, Kristi	1972
13	Ford, Harrison	1942
	Stewart, Patrick	1940
15	Aristide, Jean-Bertrand	1953
	Ventura, Jesse	1951
16	Johnson, Jimmy	1943
	Sanders, Barry	1968
18	Glenn, John	1921
	Lemelson, Jerome	1923
	Mandela, Nelson	1918
19	Tarvin, Herbert	1985
20	Hillary, Sir Edmund	1919
21	Reno, Janet	1938
	Williams, Robin	1952
22	Calder, Alexander	1898
	Dole, Bob	1923
	Hinton, S.E.	1948
23	Haile Selassie	1892
24	Abzug, Bella	1920
	Krone, Julie	1963
	Wilson, Mara	1987
26	Berenstain, Jan	1923
28	Davis, Jim	1945
29	Burns, Ken	1953
	Creech, Sharon	1945
	Dole, Elizabeth Hanford	1936
	Jennings, Peter	1938
	Morris, Wanya	1973
30	Hill, Anita	1956
	Moore, Henry	1898
	Schroeder, Pat	1940
31	Reid Banks, Lynne	1929
	Rowling, J. K.	1965

August		Year
1	Brown, Ron	1941
	Coolio	1963
	Garcia, Jerry	1942
2	Baldwin, James	1924
	Healy, Bernadine	1944
3	Roper, Dee Dee	
	Savimbi, Jonas	1934
4	Gordon, Jeff	1971
5	Ewing, Patrick	1962
	Jackson, Shirley Ann	1946
6	Robinson, David	1965
	Warhol, Andy	?1928
7	Byars, Betsy	1928
	Duchovny, David	1960
	Leakey, Louis	1903
8	Boyd, Candy Dawson	1946
9	Anderson, Gillian	1968
	Houston, Whitney	1963
	McKissack, Patricia C.	1944
	Sanders, Deion	1967
	Travers, P.L.	?1899
11	Haley, Alex	1921
	Hogan, Hulk	1953
12	Martin, Ann M.	1955
	McKissack, Fredrick L.	1939
	Myers, Walter Dean	1937
	Sampras, Pete	1971
13	Battle, Kathleen	1948
	Castro, Fidel	1927
14	Berry, Halle	?1967
	Johnson, Magic	1959
	Larson, Gary	1950
15	Affleck, Benjamin	1972
	Ellerbee, Linda	1944
18	Danziger, Paula	1944
	Murie, Margaret	1902
19	Clinton, Bill	1946
	Soren, Tabitha	1967
20	Chung, Connie	1946
	Milosevic, Slobodan	1941
21	Draper, Sharon	1952
	Toro, Natalia	1984
22	Bradbury, Ray	1920
	Schwarzkopf, H. Norman	1934
23	Bryant, Kobe	1978
	Novello, Antonia	1944
	Phoenix, River	1970
24	Arafat, Yasir	1929
	Ripken, Cal, Jr.	1960
26	Burke, Christopher	1965
	Culkin, Macaulay	1980
	Sabin, Albert	1906
	Teresa, Mother	1910
	Tuttle, Merlin	1941
27	Nechita, Alexandra	1985
28	Dove, Rita	1952
	Evans, Janet	1971

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	Peterson, Roger Tory	1908
	Priestley, Jason	1969
	Rimes, LeAnn	1982
	Twain, Shania	1965
29	Grandin, Temple	1947
	Hesse, Karen	1952
30	Earle, Sylvia	1935
31	Perlman, Itzhak	1945

September		Year
1	Estefan, Gloria	1958
2	Bearden, Romare	?1912
	Galeczka, Chris	1981
3	Delany, Bessie	1891
4	Wright, Richard	1908
5	Guisewite, Cathy	1950
7	Lawrence, Jacob	1917
	Moses, Grandma	1860
	Pippig, Uta	1965
8	Prelutsky, Jack	1940
	Thomas, Jonathan Taylor	1982
10	Gould, Stephen Jay	1941
13	Johnson, Michael	1967
	Monroe, Bill	1911
	Taylor, Mildred D.	1943
14	Stanford, John	1938
15	dePaola, Tomie	1934
	Marino, Dan	1961
16	Dahl, Roald	1916
17	Burger, Warren	1907
18	de Mille, Agnes	1905
	Fields, Debbi	1956
19	Delany, Sadie	1889
21	Fielder, Cecil	1963
	King, Stephen	1947
	Nkrumah, Kwame	1909
22	Richardson, Dot	1961
23	Nevelson, Louise	1899
24	Ochoa, Severo	1905
25	Gwaltney, John Langston	1928
	Locklear, Heather	1961
	Lopez, Charlotte	1976
	Pippen, Scottie	1965
	Reeve, Christopher	1952
	Smith, Will	1968
	Walters, Barbara	1931
26	Mandela, Winnie	1934
	Stockman, Shawn	1972
27	Handford, Martin	1956
28	Cray, Seymour	1925
29	Berenstain, Stan	1923
	Guey, Wendy	1983
	Gumbel, Bryant	1948
30	Hingis, Martina	1980
	Moceanu, Dominique	1981

October		Year
1	Carter, Jimmy	1924
	McGwire, Mark	1963
2	Leibovitz, Annie	1949
3	Campbell, Neve	1973
	Herriot, James	1916
	Winfield, Dave	1951
4	Cushman, Karen	1941
	Rice, Anne	1941
5	Fitzhugh, Louise	1928
	Hill, Grant	1972
	Lemieux, Mario	1965
	Lin, Maya	1959
	Winslet, Kate	1975
6	Lobo, Rebecca	1973
7	Ma, Yo-Yo	1955
8	Jackson, Jesse	1941
	Ringgold, Faith	1930
	Stine, R.L.	1943
9	Bryan, Zachery Ty	1981
	Senghor, Léopold Sédar	1906
10	Favre, Brett	1969
	Saro-Wiwa, Ken	1941
11	Perry, Luke	?1964
	Young, Steve	1961
12	Childress, Alice	?1920
	Ward, Charlie	1970
13	Carter, Chris	1956
	Kerrigan, Nancy	1969
	Rice, Jerry	1962
14	Daniel, Beth	1956
	Mobutu Sese Seko	1930
15	Iacocca, Lee A.	1924
16	Stewart, Kordell	1972
17	Jemison, Mae	1956
18	Foreman, Dave	1946
	Marsalis, Wynton	1961
	Navratilova, Martina	1956
	Suzuki, Shinichi	1898
20	Kenyatta, Jomo	?1891
	Mantle, Mickey	1931
21	Gillespie, Dizzy	1956

October (continued)		Year
22	Hanson, Zac	1985
23	Crichton, Michael	1942
	Pelé	1940
26	Clinton, Hillary Rodham	1947
27	Anderson, Terry	1947
28	Gates, Bill	1955
	Salk, Jonas	1914
29	Ryder, Winona	1971
31	Candy, John	1950
	Paterson, Katherine	1932
	Pauley, Jane	1950

November		Year
2	lang, k.d.	1961
3	Arnold, Roseanne	1952
4	Combs, Sean (Puff Daddy)	1969
	Handler, Ruth	1916
8	Mittermeier, Russell A.	1949
9	Denton, Sandi	
	Sagan, Carl	1934
11	DiCaprio, Leonardo	1974
	Vonnegut, Kurt	1922
12	Andrews, Ned	1980
	Harding, Tonya	1970
	Sosa, Sammy	1968
13	Goldberg, Whoopi	1949
14	Boutros-Ghali, Boutros	1922
	Hussein, King	1935
15	O'Keeffe, Georgia	1887
16	Baiul, Oksana	1977
17	Fuentes, Daisy	1966
	Hanson, Ike	1980
18	Driscoll, Jean	1966
	Mankiller, Wilma	1945
19	Devers, Gail	1966
	Glover, Savion	1973
	Strug, Kerri	1977
21	Aikman, Troy	1966
	Griffey, Ken, Jr.	1969
	Speare, Elizabeth George	1908
24	Ndeti, Cosmas	1971
25	Grant, Amy	1960
	Thomas, Lewis	1913
26	Patrick, Ruth	1907
	Pine, Elizabeth Michele	1975
	Schulz, Charles	1922
27	Nye, Bill	1955
	White, Jaleel	1977
29	L'Engle, Madeleine	1918
	Lewis, C. S.	1898
	Tubman, William V. S.	1895
30	Jackson, Bo	1962
	Parks, Gordon	1912

December		Year
2	Macaulay, David	1946
	Seles, Monica	1973
	Watson, Paul	1950
3	Filipovic, Zlata	1980
7	Bird, Larry	1956
8	Rivera, Diego	1886
12	Bialik, Mayim	1975
	Frankenthaler, Helen	1928
	Sinatra, Frank	1915
13	Fedorov, Sergei	1969
14	Jackson, Shirley	1916
15	Aidid, Mohammed Farah	1934
	Mendes, Chico	1944
16	Bailey, Donovan	1967
	McCary, Michael	1971
	Mead, Margaret	1901
18	Pitt, Brad	1964
	Sanchez Vicario, Arantxa	1971
	Spielberg, Steven	1947
19	Morrison, Sam	1936
	White, Reggie	1961
20	Uchida, Mitsuko	1948
21	Evert, Chris	1954
	Griffith Joyner, Florence	1959
22	Pinkney, Jerry	1939
23	Avi	1937
	Harbaugh, Jim	1963
25	Sadat, Anwar	1918
26	Butcher, Susan	1954
27	Roberts, Cokie	1943
28	Washington, Denzel	1954
30	Woods, Tiger	1975

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